

**THE *GUSLE* - THE SOUND OF SERBIAN EPIC POETRY:
AN EXAMINATION OF CONTEMPORARY *GUSLE* PERFORMANCE
PRACTICES AND *GUSLE* INSTRUMENT-MAKING IN SERBIA AND
THE SERBIAN-AUSTRALIAN DIASPORA COMMUNITY**

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Statement of Declaration

This project contains no material which has been accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma in any university or other institution. I affirm that to the best of my knowledge, the project contains no material previously published or written by another person, except where due reference is made in the text of the project.

Candidate's signature.....

Date.....

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Abstract

The project film, *The Gusle: The Sound of Serbian Epic Poetry*, focuses on the significance of contemporary gusle music performance practices in Serbia and the Serbian-Australian community, especially that part of the community comprising the Serbian Diaspora of the 1990s. The study takes into account the narrative component of gusle performance in the texts of epic poetry which embody Serbian historical events. The complexity and variety of themes in Serbian epic and lyric poetry make the gusle genre a rich source for the examination of issues related to perceptions of Serbian and Serbian-Australian identity.

The exegesis includes an historical context, references to related literature, phenomenographic interview analyses, and an organological overview of the gusle tradition as an aspect of Serbian culture in Serbia and Australia. The aim of the research is to contribute to the longer term cultural preservation of gusle performance and to examine different meanings the music, instrument and poetry have for contemporary Serbian musicians and musicians in the Serbian-Australian community. Studying the instrument manufacturing processes of the gusle and exploring detailed descriptions of the instrument (an organological approach) illuminate diverse aspects of Serbian cultural traditions. The research confirms that the gusle tradition is an ancient cultural and artistic entity almost certainly original to the peoples of the Dinaric region. This study verifies that the Dinaric region is the only place where the gusle tradition has existed continuously. The essentially tribal communities of the Dinaric region managed to protect, perhaps indeed save, the tradition despite an array of significant impediments both external and, more recently, internal. Crucial to the spread of the gusle tradition beyond the Dinaric region of the Balkans was the use of the instrument to accompany the performance of Serbian epic and lyric poetry. Indeed, the use of the instrument became so significant to the customary presentation of *pesme* that the genre itself ultimately incorporated the name of the instrument. The art form – with its philosophical, spiritual, historical and educative content – became known as the gusle tradition, and presenters of *pesme*, with or without the gusle instrument in accompaniment, have for centuries been referred to as *guslari*.

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

Serbian music is intimately bound up with significant Balkan cultural and historical events. Throughout the Balkans – and especially in Serbia – stories, moral teachings and religious beliefs are passed from one generation to another through song and dance. In particular, songs and performance practices associated with the musical instrument, the *gusle*, have played a pivotal role in the transmission of cultural and historical events and traditions within the Balkan regions populated by peoples of Serbian extraction.

This exegesis explores the nature of *gusle* music-making and the song/poetry repertoire associated with it within contemporary Serbian populations including the Serbian community in Australia. Particular focus will be paid to the cultural and historical significance of *gusle* music to these populations. The study explores the adaptation of the *gusle* style by people of non-Serbian background and non-Orthodox religious groups with which the peoples of Serbia came into contact over time. The Australian components of the research relate to the Serbian Diaspora community of the 1990s which is linked closely to the Serbian Orthodox Church of Melbourne.

The Australian Serbian community consists largely of immigrants who left primarily poor, depressed or abandoned parts of the former Yugoslavia from about 1996-97 after the fall of the Serb Republic of Krajina in 1995. This community is generally culturally homogenous, continuing to practise their traditions whilst avoiding assimilation into the dominant Anglo-European cultural practices of contemporary Australia. Within this community is embedded the *gusle* and Serbian epic/lyric poetry of Australia. The Serbian community of Melbourne has a number of accomplished performers of *gusle* whose work will be covered in this project.

1.1 The project

The film project at the centre of this study brings together interviews and performances regarding the Serbian *gusle* tradition in Australia and Serbia. These elements are presented as a documentary-style film. During the period of research (2006-2010) I travelled twice to the regions of Serbia and Bosnia and Herzegovina. I also visited Adelaide, Australia for a second

interview with the performer Đordije Koprivica (21 December 2008) – the first interview having been conducted in Belgrade, Serbia earlier that year.

The structure of the film is organised under the following sections.

1. Introduction

The opening of the film introduces the sound of the gusle instrument and gives the geographical position of the Dinaric region.

2. The origin of the gusle

The origin of the gusle instrument is still unknown. The gusle practitioners hypothesise about the origin of the instrument and the tradition and they discuss the characteristics of the Serbian gusle tradition.

3. Gusle making

The maple tree is the main source of wood for gusle making. The gusle practitioners explain the organological details regarding the gusle instrument.

4. Serbian Orthodox Church and the gusle tradition

The Serbian Orthodox Church was the only Serbian institution actively following the destiny of the Serbian people during the long period of foreign occupation. As the keepers of the Serbian tradition, Serbian priests learned to play the gusle. Petar Petrović Njegoš was a Prince-Bishop of the Serbian Orthodox Church in Montenegro, the ruler of Montenegro and a poet. He is the most celebrated and respected character amongst Serbs related to the gusle tradition.

5. Collection of Serbian epic poems

In the middle of the nineteenth century, Vuk Stefanović Karadžić published the first collection of Serbian folk poems. He used the personal friendships with famous European artists to spread the word about Serbian folk poetry.

6. Serbian epic poetry

When we refer to the gusle we unavoidably think of Serbian epic poetry. Gusle devotees show the extent the valuable matters from the gusle tradition influenced the generations of Serbs.

7. The importance of gusle tradition

Superstition, beliefs and rules are part of the gusle tradition. Gusle performers bring the people together saying that the facts from history give directions for the future.

8. Gusle singing technique

Authentic gusle songs are decasyllabic. Modern and contemporary performers bring the faster rhythms. The most important aspects of gusle performance are the strength and clarity of the singing.

9. The gusle tradition as an inspiration

The question is posed as to the differences between positive and negative nationalism, and whether the gusle performance is the flagship of the Serbian nationalism.

10. Conclusion

This section presents the questions: After centuries of struggle Serbs recorded the events from their history through the epic poetry, is it possible to find answers and solutions from the past which might be useful in the present. Were the Serbs willing and able to learn from the treasure that is the gusle tradition?

1.2 The exegesis

The project is supported by the exegesis that explores the degree to which Serbian culture and tradition are related to gusle traditions, and the impacts upon perceptions of patriotism and nationalism amongst the Serbian-Australian Diaspora community in Melbourne, especially from the Serbian Diasporas of the 1990s. The study seeks to gain an understanding of the importance of Serbian epic and lyric poetry and the gusle tradition within the Serbian Diaspora communities of Melbourne. The extent to which elements of these traditions are important to the members of those Serbian communities will be explored. The research includes phenomenographic methods in combination of interview-based fieldwork with a

review of social, cultural and historical literature located primarily in the academic domains of ethnomusicology, organology and cultural sociology.

Although it is not possible to address all issues related to Serbian epic and lyric poetry, the gusle tradition, Serbs in Melbourne or Serbs in general in an exegesis such as this – I have attempted to ensure that salient components of these subjects, issues and contexts are discussed and analysed. Whilst many writers have sought to provide explanations regarding a range of issues relating to Serbs, Serbian cultural and traditional heritage, this study is possibly the first exposition that focuses primarily upon Serbian traditional gusle performance and Serbian epic and lyric poetry as they relate to Serbs living in Melbourne, Australia in the first decade of the twenty-first century.

During this study, I took the perspective of a Serbian traditional music practitioner/ researcher which helped me to combine the practical knowledge with the phenomenographic research methods). These are discussed more fully in Chapter Two – Research Methodology, but, in line with a researcher's perspective, my understanding grew over time as I encountered new knowledge and problems and had to relate these to my existing knowledge base.

1.2a Structure of the Exegesis

Chapter One – Introduction

The chapter brings the introduction to the research and an outline of the structure of the exegesis and the film project. It gives a brief overview of the nature of gusle music and gusle practice in Australia.

Chapter Two – Research Methodology

This chapter includes a discussion of the research methodology and a description of the data collection methods employed in the study.

Chapter Three – Serbian tradition

Chapter three refers to Serbian language and the oral tradition. The hidden meanings in Serbian epic poetry and the influence of the patriotism of the ancient heroes on the present day nationalism amongst the Serbs were presented.

Chapter Four – The Experience of migration in the Serbian-Australian Diaspora Communities

A discussion of the organisational role and influence of the Serbian Orthodox Church in Australia, and in particular the Serbian Diaspora is in the centre of the chapter.

Chapter Five – Organology of gusle

This chapter presents an overview of the development of gusle instrument and gives the aspects and characteristics of the vocal style and the improvised nature of gusle performance. Social and cultural importance of gusle tradition and the relationship between the gusle performer and the audience as important data collected in the study are also explained in this chapter.

Chapter Six – Findings of the research

This chapter builds on the implications of the research aiming to develop a model for strategic planning that gives a solid base for the future, extended research, leading to the higher degree of the understanding the gusle tradition.

Chapter Seven

This chapter presents the answers and responses related to the secondary questions and the research findings.

Chapter Eight provides the conclusions to the study.

1.3 The nature of gusle music

Musical performance of the gusle style is a traditional form of music-making in Serbia which involves a large repertoire of epic and lyric poems – henceforth referred to in this study as songs. The songs are a direct, relatively straightforward and often only available channel for the handing down of traditions and cultural memory of the Serbian peoples during periods of occupation.

The gusle is a stringed musical instrument of the Balkans with a rounded wooden back and a (commonly) goatskin belly or top featuring a single string (infrequently two strings) made of horsehair secured at the top of the instrument's neck by a rear-tuning peg. It is played in a

vertical position with a deeply curved bow. It has no fingerboard *per se*, the string being stopped by the sideways pressure of the player's fingers rather than by pressing the string against the fingerboard. Together with a narrator/reciter, gusle player, or *guslari* as they are known, constitute the majority of public performers continuing the tradition of Serbian epic and lyric poetry, known as *pesme*.

Gusle songs generally feature narratives about patriotism and various struggles to achieve and maintain political and social freedom. In this sense, gusle songs embody a sense of nationalism that is related directly to struggles for political, cultural and ethnic independence. These patriotic feelings and issues feature strongly in accounts of Serbian cultural history. Serbian poetry and music have long been considered a powerful and critical mechanism for Serbian survival through centuries of occupation. Indeed, Serbian customs consider it a sign of strength for one to sing as one dies. An important question explored in this exposition is the extent to which in Australia the *gusle* style and its elements are viewed as a significant medium for the transmission of historical knowledge to a generation of Serbs who were either born in Australia to immigrant parents of the Diaspora or who arrived with their parents at a young age.

1.4 Rationale

Serbia is a treasury of the evolution and dissemination of music of the Balkans. I became aware of the gusle as a young boy in Vojvodina, the northern part of Serbia. In that region, *guslari* were viewed as exotic or esoteric performers. I found the poetry, the music and the style intriguing and so endeavoured to learn and subsequently perform a number of the traditional songs, without ever realising their considerable cultural and historical significance.

Perhaps as much as eighty percent of the Serbian immigrants to Australia in the mid-1990s were from the southern-central and western regions of former Yugoslavia – that is, from Montenegro, Bosnia and Herzegovina and Croatia. In addition, only a very small number of the émigrés from these regions were familiar with the *gusle* style and even fewer were adherents to the tradition. Indeed, in order to hear *gusle* performers of the twentieth century demanded a search of rare amateur recordings generally available only in private collections in both Australia and the (modern) Republic of Serbia. These recordings were generally of poor quality. Nevertheless, a significant portion of this research is focused primarily upon

contemporary live performance by active *guslari* from Australia and the Balkan regions where the style remains extant.

1.5 Aims of the research

The research seeks an understanding of the extent to which the Serbian-Australian community of Melbourne recognises the cultural and historical significance of gusle performance. In particular by attempting to explore the levels of awareness of Serbian epic/lyric poetry (*pesme*) within the community and then the degree to which the meanings and implications of the often hidden messages within gusle performance are comprehended. (I shall refer to the ‘hidden’ elements later.) Hence, the research acknowledges differences regarding gusle perception whilst highlighting the diversity of perspectives and levels of awareness apropos the gusle tradition. This research will form a basis for undertaking further investigations regarding the gusle tradition.

1.6 Historical context

The ethnographic approach (Dević, 1986) in this study takes into account cultural phenomena perceived as historically significant to the musicians and audience members contacted and interviewed through the fieldwork. As mentioned above, stories of past Balkan events, as well as moral teachings and religious beliefs are passed down from one generation to another through songs and dances. As a traditional music genre, *gusle* music has maintained its local and regional variants – that is, as rural folk music its form differs from area to area. Notably, however, whilst music to accompany *gusle* may once have been perceived as part of the oral heritage of Serbs, urban dwellers of today have been affected significantly by the influences of the global music industry and have become more attracted to commercial Western (and near-Eastern) music than the musical sounds and styles of the *gusle* tradition.

As a result of my research I have noticed that *gusle* traditions are still, nevertheless, accepted and well-preserved in the rural areas of modern Serbia and regions with significant Serbian populations. Indeed, *gusle* repertoire and music-making continue to be regarded as an important part of the Serbia’s national traditional heritage. Furthermore, *gusle* repertoire and musical performance traditions are viewed as important sources for formal and informal cultural education. This educative function was especially important during the time of the Ottoman occupation (14th to 20th centuries AD) when Serbian cultural phenomena were suppressed (Bataković, 2000, p. 91). As poets, keepers of tradition, educators and links

between pagan traditions and Christian teachings, performers of Serbian epic poems (commonly referred to as ‘songs’, whether sung or recited) have played an important role in the maintenance of many practices and beliefs of the Serbian Orthodox Church.

It is important to note that, despite cultural change brought about by war, occupation, regional conflicts, boundary changes, forced and voluntary migration, and changes of the instruments used for performance (for example, to guitar and keyboard.), *gusle* musical traditions remain extant. Interestingly, *gusle* performances in modern Croatia and Albania are increasingly common. Bataković (2000) suggests “This is because of the Serbian populations in Croatia and Albania having been subjected to changes in political and geographical boundaries especially in the 20th century. The imposed partitioning caused transference of ethnocentric cultural and religious practices to varying degrees. Responses to these changes are evidenced by tensions and challenges to traditional perceptions of cultural identity” (p. 378). Essentially, although many Serbian people are located within ‘foreign’ cultures and are citizens of different nation states, they continue to practise many of the significant cultural elements of their ancestors. That is why, for example, there are two fairly different cultures in Croatia: a significant percentage of the population has Serbian lineage and many continue to observe fundamentally Serbian cultural practices and traditions.

1.7 Gusle in Australia

Australia is a culturally diverse country. The Serbian Diaspora community in Australia contributes to this diversity through its various cultural practices. Whilst the Serbian contribution might at first seem small, it is a notable part of contemporary Australia. An important part of this research is focused upon the Serbian community of Melbourne, Australia – primarily a community of the Serbian Diaspora since the 1990s.

I shall argue that *gusle* songs embody a range of significant cultural and historical elements and issues which contribute notably to both the Serbian and Serb-Australian character, identity and collective personality. While Serbs are comparatively new arrivals to Australia (almost exclusively since 1945), their poetry and music-making contribute substantially to the culturally diverse texture that is modern Australia, meanwhile maintaining cultural, spiritual, religious and historical connections to their ancestry and homeland.

CHAPTER TWO

METHODOLOGY

The research methodology used in this study included conducting interviews regarding musical performance and repertoire as well as various organological issues. A phenomenographic analysis (Dick, 2005) and interpretation of interviews (Dick, 2005) performances and organological data was informed by historicism (Ćorović, 1989; Karadžić, 1814), participant observation (Marton, 1986) and ethnographic studies (Parry 1930; Lord, 1951). As a performer of traditional Serbian music, my participant observation (Marton, 1981) and organological focus were central methodological elements.

To paraphrase Hood (1971, p. 124) in relation to organological elements, organology involves not only the study of the history and description of musical instruments but also the study of performance techniques, musical function, instrument construction, decoration and socio-cultural considerations associated with the instruments. In organological studies musical instruments are perceived as valuable sources of information. As Kartomi (1990) has shown, an examination of the use of different materials used in the construction of musical instruments and considerations about systems of classification of musical instruments can assist in assembling an approximate picture of the movements of peoples and describing of past cultural and material exchanges. This research will examine how *gusle* performance practices and associated repertoire contribute to the cultural picture of Serbs and Serbian-Australians.

My methodological approach partly reflects concepts found in the application of grounded theory (Dick, 2005). As Dick (2005) espoused, “grounded theory begins with a research situation. Within that situation, your task as researcher is to understand what is happening there and how the players manage their roles” (p. 2). This is done in this study via observation, transcriptions of recorded conversations and digital audio-visual recordings of music and interviews. After each round of data collection the key issues were elucidated and analysed. Data collected in the interviews were compared with similar data from interviews (Marton, 1981, p. 14). To create the criteria of relevance I have also used the general historical data and the records made by other researchers in the field.

According to Marton (1981) comparison is at the heart of the interviewing process. I have used the experiences of Dević (1986) and Golemović (2005) as a guide to the research process. At the outset are comparisons of one interview (or other data such as a performance) to another interview (or other data) and an exploration of various categories and sub-categories of phenomena related to *gusle* performance (Lajić-Mihailović, 2007, p. 135). Theories concerning the function and meaning of contemporary *gusle* performance and repertoire established by Golemović (2008) emerge through this process. These theories include:

- time place and function
- audience
- repertoire (old and contemporary songs)
- melodic-poetic shapes of *gusle* songs
- social meaning and the importance of the tradition
- the characteristics of *gusle* performance

The use of phenomenographic analysis (Marton, 1986) of interview transcripts further reflects the emerging nature of how the *gusle* tradition is perceived by people currently involved with its practice. While drawing heavily on Marton the study was influenced by the writings of Giorgi and Giorgi (2003), Reid, Flowers and Larkin (2005), Smith (2004). The analysis shows the data related to passion, creativity, commitment, and a belief in the values of the tradition among the various age groups of Serbs in the Balkans and the Diaspora. Where appropriate in this research, discursive elements from the fields of linguistics (Ivić, 1995), and Serbian literature (Đurić, 1977) provide additional lenses to explore the evolution and significance of *gusle* to Serb culture in general.

2.1 Data collection

My family background and strong relationship with the tradition and culture of the people from the city of Glamoč in Bosnia together with my personal experience as a performer of traditional Serbian music with a good understanding of Serbian epic poetry were solid starting point in the research process. Alongside the interviews, field work and observations were important sources for data collection. The field work was undertaken during the visits to Serbia and Bosnia. Significant part of the research was carried out in Australia.

I visited Serbia and Bosnia from July until October 2006. During this time I recorded seven interviews with the people who were related to the gusle tradition. The field work involved the visit of the gusle performances in Belgrade and two private gusle sessions organised by gusle devotees in Belgrade. I noticed that none of the people attending the private performances were not born in Belgrade or Serbia. All of them were born in Dinaric region of Bosnia and Herzegovina and Montenegro. Their experience, personal stories and knowledge about the gusle tradition eased my process of learning and observation.

During the visit of Glamoč in Bosnia I recorded two interviews with the people who were born in Glamoč. This visit helped me to gain knowledge about the various organological issues related to the gusle instrument. This visit was important to define the differences between the appreciation and care for the tradition between the people who remained at the source of the tradition and those who are receiving the tradition throughout various socio-cultural filters of contemporary urban society.

Another important source of data was a collection of written materials. I had the opportunity to approach and to collect the written material regarding the gusle tradition which I was not able to find in Australia. Surprised by the fact that I was not able to find much written material available at Serbian book shops or public libraries, I used the opportunity to collect the data mostly from a private collections. Slavko Aleksić assisted me to source and locate most of the written and audio material.

In Australia, I travelled to Adelaide in December 2008 to have another interview with Đorđije Koprivica. That was a good opportunity to record his performance at the Serbian Orthodox Church in Adelaide. Between February 2007 until December 2009 I have completed twelve interviews with the interviewee's living in Melbourne, Australia. By those interviews I have completed the process of data collection.

2.2 Interviewing as phenomenographic process

According to Marton (1981) interviewing is the primary method of phenomenographic data collection. The initial interview with gusle performer and professor of Serbian literature Slavko Aleksić guided me with the interviewing process. What questions are asked and indeed how they are asked are significant aspects of the phenomenographic method. After the interviews were completed they were transcribed and the transcripts subjected to analysis.

Analytical processes included categorisation according to similarities and differences, sub-sets of perception and perspective, especially with respect to matters of history and culture (Đurić, 1977), similarities and difference related to matters of regional or geographic heritage (Golemović, 2005), and so forth. As the interviews were transcribed relevant data was organised by the researcher into various categories and sub-sets.

Before starting this process it was necessary for the researcher to 'bracket' (Marton, 1981) ideas he may have towards the data. That is, 'bracketing' in phenomenography, involves the researcher putting aside preconceived notions about his subject in order to explore immediate experience of the studied phenomenon.

According to Marton (1986) the first phase of the analysis is a procedure used to select criteria of relevance from the transcripts. That is, quotations are categorised into areas of relevance to different responses to the phenomena being examined. The researcher's attention is shifted from the individual subjects to the meaning embedded in the quotations themselves. Interest is focused on the "pool of meanings" (Marton, 1986, p. 33) discovered in the data.

As a result of the interpretative work, utterances are brought together into categories on the basis of their similarities. Then "categories are differentiated from one another in terms of their differences. Quotations are sorted into piles, borderline cases are examined and eventually the criterion attributes for each group are made explicit" (Marton, 1986, p. 33). Marton added

In this way the groups of quotes are narrowed into categories and finally defined in terms of core meanings. Each category is illustrated by quotations from the data. As the meanings of categories begin to form, those meanings determine which quotations should be excluded from specific categories. Hence, the bracketing/categorising entails the continual sorting and re-sorting of data. Definitions for categories are tested against the data, adjusted, re-tested and adjusted again. (Marton, 1986, p. 43)

In the interview process I took into account the gusle tradition as it is currently practised in Melbourne. The use of the phenomenographic research process sought to elucidate how members of the Serbian-Australian communities find meaning in Serbian epic/lyric poetry and the gusle tradition. This explication will contribute to cultural and historical awareness of

Serbian traditions and culture, especially throughout the Serbian-Australian communities and the sub-cultures of former Yugoslavia.

From an exploration of the literature, this study is the first research related to Serbian culture and the gusle tradition undertaken in Australia. According to that I was not able to rely on any other source of information linked to the issues in connection to the gusle tradition among the Serbian-Australian Diaspora. This research should give a solid starting point for the future research in the areas interested in Serbian culture and traditions in Australia.

Interviewees were selected with a view to covering a representative cross-section of ages and societal, economic and educational backgrounds. These people are in contact with the gusle tradition in a variety of ways and who relate to it from a range of perspectives. The interviewees can be classified as being associated with gusle performance and its traditions in five broad categories.

1. Performers of the genre
2. Devotees or followers of the genre (not performers)
3. People with a basic knowledge of the genre
4. People with a poor knowledge of the genre
5. People who were virtually unaware of the genre or who perhaps ignore it purposely.

In Figure 1 the interviewees have been further categorised by age, place of interview, level of involvement with gusle, and educational experience.

Figure 1 Key to interviewee age bracket in figure

<p><i>Age Brackets –</i> A = 20 years and under B = 21 to 35 years C = 36 to 55 years D = 56 to 75 years E = above 75 years.</p>
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Note: The relative age of the interviewees was an important consideration in the research process and to some of the findings of the research. A reasonable balance was attempted across the twenty-year age ranges as per the following: **A**: two interviewees, **B**: five interviewees, **C**: five interviewees, **D**: six interviewees, **E**: two interviewees.

Table 1: Interviewees

<i>Interviewee</i>	<i>Age bracket</i> †	<i>Place of Interview</i>	<i>Date of the Interview</i>	<i>Involvement with Gusle tradition</i>	<i>Education level – Discipline or Fields</i>
Slavko Aleksić	D	Belgrade, Serbia	26/10/2006	Professor of Literature, scholar/author & gusle performer	Tertiary – Serbian Literature (BA)
Stevan Berber	D	Melbourne, Australia	30/12/2009	Basic knowledge about tradition	Tertiary – Electronic Engineering (PhD) & Military Science (BMilSci)
Slobodan Čičarević	D	Melbourne, Australia	22/2/2008	Gusle performer and scholar	Completed primary school
Davor Ćurković	C	Glamoč, Bosnia and Herzegovina	18/09/2006	Basic knowledge about tradition	Tertiary – Dentistry (BDent)
Sanja Drljača	B	Melbourne, Australia	04/11/2008	Basic knowledge of tradition	Tertiary – Music (BMus)
Đorđije Koprivica	B	Belgrade, Serbia & Adelaide, Australia	26/10/2006 and 21/12/2008	Gusle performer and scholar/author	Tertiary – Economics (BEcon)
Petar Marijanović	C	Melbourne, Australia	13/04/2007	Basic knowledge about tradition	Diploma (TAFE) – Business studies
Mile Nović	D	Sombor, Serbia	08/08/2006	Professor of Literature (ret.)	Tertiary – Serbian Literature (BA)
Milan Milutinović	E	Melbourne, Australia	28/09/2007	Serbian Orthodox Priest	Tertiary – Fine Arts (BA) & Religion (BTh)
Zoran Plemić	B	Belgrade, Serbia	27/09/2006	Gusle performer	Completed secondary school
Luka Rakočević	D	Melbourne, Australia	24/02/2007	Basic knowledge about tradition	Completed primary school
Zoran Rakočević	C	Melbourne, Australia	24/02/2007	Basic knowledge about tradition	Tertiary – Electrical & Electronic Engineering (BEng)
Goran Šijan	C	Sombor, Serbia	16/07/2006	Limited knowledge about tradition	Tertiary – Politics (BPolSci)
Mirosljub Stanković	D	Melbourne, Australia	12/04/2008	Basic knowledge about tradition	Tertiary – Chemistry (BSc)
Milenko Stojisavljević	E	Glamoč, Bosnia and Herzegovina	19/09/2006	Basic knowledge about tradition	Advanced Diploma– Military studies
Stanislava Stojisavljević	B	Melbourne, Australia	20/09/2009	Basic knowledge about tradition	Tertiary – Arts Administration (MA) & Education (BPed)
Tijana Stojisavljević	A	Melbourne, Australia	20/09/2009	Basic knowledge about tradition	Completed secondary school
Djordje Stojković	A	Melbourne, Australia	08/05/2008	Limited knowledge about tradition	Completed secondary school
Nedjeljko Vlahović	B	Melbourne, Australia	18/05/2008	Limited knowledge about tradition	Completed secondary school & Professional Musician
Milan Vojnović	D	Sombor, Serbia	03/07/2006	Professor of Sociology (ret.) Basic knowledge about tradition	Tertiary – Sociology (BA)

When framing the research and seeking to establish its focus it was necessary to establish the characteristics that comprise the musical, social and cultural genre that is Serbian gusle tradition. These characteristics include issues and contexts of Serbian history (Ćorović, 1989):

- Places where gusle tradition exists (or once existed) (Koprivica & Aleksić, 2006)
- Characteristics, meanings and purposes of *pesme* (Serbian epic and lyric poetry), especially within the contexts of gusle performance (Đurić, 1977)
- Role(s) of the gusle in contemporary society (Nović, 2006)
- Meanings and purposes of gusle tradition, especially educative, societal and spiritual (Koprivica & Aleksić, 2006)
- The cultural and social perception of gusle tradition among the Serbian people (Golemović, 2008)
- The influence of traditionalism on perceptions of nationalism amongst Serbs (Radanović, 2003)
- The audience – role, perceptions, perspectives and levels of awareness of the tradition (Golemović, 2005)
- Gusle as a performance genre, including repertoire and various approaches to repertoire and the range of performance practices (Lajić – Mihailović, 2007)
- Technical characteristics of the gusle musical instrument (Koprivica & Aleksić, 2006)

These characteristics informed the construction of the research questions which have guided this study.

2.3 Primary and secondary research questions

My research examines two primary questions. First, what are the cultural functions of *gusle* performance practices and repertoire in contemporary Serbia and within the Diaspora-based Serbian-Australian community in Melbourne? Second, what meanings are attributed to music of the *gusle* style by those who perform and listen to it?

These questions are supported by five secondary research questions related to the meaning and function of traditional *gusle* music-making:

1. To what extent does contemporary *gusle* performance reflect contemporary social and cultural phenomena in Serbia (particularly differentiations in the Dinaric region) and the Serbian-Australian Diaspora of the mid-1990s?
2. To what extent does contemporary *gusle* music-making relate to perceptions of Serbian and Serbian-Australian identity?
3. How has *gusle* performance in Australia been influenced by the experience of migration?
4. What is the nature of traditional and contemporary *gusle* instrument-making techniques, especially with respect to similarities and differences?
5. To what extent do the traditional *gusle* instrument-making practices reflect and influence contemporary music performance practice?

In the next chapter I shall outline the historical and contemporary contexts which underpin these questions.

2.4 The interview questions

The interviews that formed an integral part of the research followed a schedule of semi-structured questions. These covered areas such as:

- How old is the gusle (instrument)?
- What is the role of the *guslar*?
- What are the themes in the songs performed by gusle performers?
- Where do you think the gusle tradition began?
- Does gusle text change?
- Do gusle players exist among other nations?
- Do you know what the oldest Serbian epic song is?
- What does the term gusle mean to you?
- Would heroes use the gusle before battle?
- Are there any female gusle performers?
- What is the origin of your family name?
- When was the first time you saw the gusle (instrument or performance)?
- What materials are used to make the gusle?
- Do the gusle carvings have particular meaning?

- Are gusle a popular musical instrument in your homeland?
- To what extent do Serbian people support the gusle tradition?
- How do you think young Serbian people regard Serbian tradition?
- Does the gusle tradition play a role in a Serbian family?
- What is relation between gusle and Serbian Christianity?
- To what extent are members of the Serbian Orthodox church involved with gusle tradition?

2.5 Additional interview questions for gusle performers (*Guslari*)

In addition to the above questions, a series of questions were specifically directed to the gusle performers:

- Who made your gusle?
- When did you begin playing the gusle?
- With what songs did you begin?
- Who are the gusle makers?
- As a younger generation gusle player, which songs are your favourites?

2.6 Additional interview questions for Serbian-Australians

For the Serbian-Australian interviewees the following questions were posed:

- When did you arrive to Australia?
- What did gusle mean to you after you arrived to Australia?
- How many gusle performers live and perform in Australia?
- To what extent do Serbian people in Melbourne, Australia support the gusle tradition?

In addition, some of the interviews included spontaneous questions arising during interviews. These came about as a result of the researcher's perceived need to pursue further a line of enquiry prompted by a particular response, and to align with the tone or ambience of the conversation with the interviewee. All of the interviewees answered all of the questions posed to them by the researcher. This consideration is of particular significance with reference to the experiences of Serbs in Australia and New Zealand apropos of their perceptions and

perspectives related to Serbian culture and traditions, especially those of *pesme* and *gusle*. As a musician with the experience of more than 25 years of active performance I choose the questions in a way to suit the form of the interview as a research method but also to make sure that all the participants would understand the questions.

The interview participants included a Serbian Orthodox priest and lay scholar of the tradition, several *gusle* performers and literary scholars with academic or research-based expertise into Serbian literature, *pesme* in particular. Secondary sessions were conducted with the two scholars/authors to explore more refined queries.

2.7 Analysis

In order to examine various ways that people perceive and experience the *gusle* tradition in both Serbia and Australia I have adopted methods associated with the phenomenographic process developed by Ference Marton (1986). Phenomenography is a research methodology intended as a means of mapping the “qualitatively different ways in which people experience, conceptualize, perceive and understand various aspects of, or phenomena, in the world around them” (Marton, 1986, p. 31). As we shall see, the *gusle* tradition in Serbia and Australia is perceived and experienced in different ways by my informants. Phenomenography as a tool for revealing different perceptions was appropriate for this research.

The emphasis on the significance of ‘different’ experiences by different people about the same phenomena differentiates phenomenography and phenomenology both as research processes and methodologies. Both phenomenography and phenomenology have human experience as its object. However, “Phenomenology is the study of structures of consciousness as experienced from the first-person point of view” (Woodruff Smith, 2008). Phenomenographers, on the other hand, adopt an empirical orientation, and then investigate the experience of others (Marton, 1986). Phenomenography asserts that each phenomenon, concept or principle can be understood in a limited number of qualitatively different ways by different individuals (Marton, 1986, p. 31) whereas phenomenology focuses upon how these things can be (or are) understood by the individual researcher. “Within phenomenography, thinking is described in terms of what is perceived and thought about” (Marton, 1986, p. 32). Phenomenographers are also interested in different conceptions of reality. Phenomenographers make statements about people’s perceptions of the world and they do not

try to describe things as they are. They discuss whether or not things can be described and they try to characterize how things appear to people (Marton, 1986, p. 32). Further, “Phenomenography provides descriptions that are relational, experiential, content-oriented and qualitative” (Marton, 1986, p. 31).

Marton goes on to observe that “It is important to look at the most essential and distinctive structural aspects of the relation between the individual and the phenomenon” (Marton, 1986 p. 31) in this case, the relation between my informants and the gusle tradition. My goal is to discover the structural framework within which various categories of understanding exist. Phenomenographers discover and classify previously unspecified ways in which people think about aspects of the perceptions of phenomenon. Differing experiences and understandings are characterized in terms of “categories of description” (Marton, 1986, p. 33), which are related to each other and can be formed into relation hierarchies. Such an ordered set of categories of description is called the “outcome space” of the phenomenon concept in question. Categories and organized systems of categories are the most important component of phenomenographic research. I shall discuss the system of categories as they relate to this study later.

In the course of the interviews participants were invited to reflect on their experience of the phenomenon of *gusle* tradition.

As discussed above the phenomenographic analysis of interview transcripts involved

1. revealing categories of relevance,
2. pools of meaning,
3. categories of differences and similarity,
4. core meanings and finally,
5. categories of description.

The interviewees were selected using the following criteria:

- Gusle performers from Serbia (or outside Australia)
- Gusle devotees from Serbia (or outside Australia)
- Gusle devotees from Australia
- Members of Serbian-Australian community
- Members of Serbian Orthodox church in Australia

2.7 (a) Categories of relevance

Diagram 1 below shows the number, place of interviews and the involvement of interviewees with the gusle tradition.

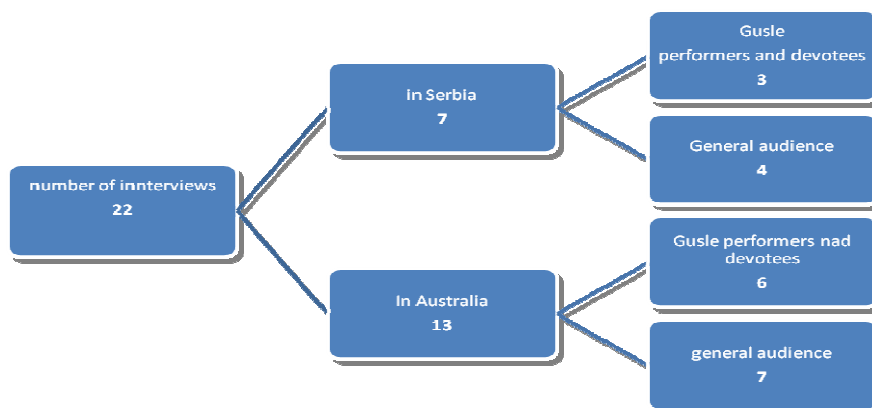


Diagram 1 - the number of interviews, place of interviews and the involvement of interviewees with the gusle tradition.

A total of twenty-two interviews were completed. These interviews were carried out with people living in Serbia and in Melbourne, Australia. Seven interviewees were from Serbia and thirteen from Australia. Two of them were interviewed twice because their involvement with the tradition was crucial for my doctoral research process. Three interviewees from Serbia are gusle professional performers and the other four interviewees from Serbia belong to the general audience. Thirteen interviewees were from Australia: six were gusle performers and devotees and the other seven belong to general audience.

2.7 (b) Interviews categorised by gender and the place of the interviews

Diagram 2 shows the relation between gender and number and place of the interviews. The interview process included nineteen interviews with male and three interviews with female interviewees. Six interviews with male interviewees were held in Serbia and thirteen in Australia. One interview with the female gusle devotee was held in Serbia and two in Australia.

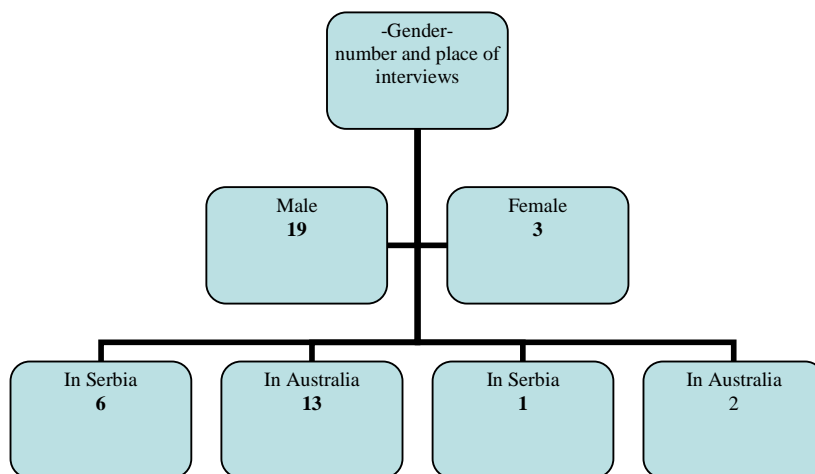


Diagram 2 - relation between gender and number and place of the interviews

The first technique for reducing the data involves identifying categories of relevance. That is, categories relevant to this study. Categories of description revealed in the initial analyses of the data are shown in Diagram 3 below. It is important to note all interviews were transcribed and the transcripts subjected to careful phenomenographic analysis. The researcher read the transcripts and made allocation of each transcript to one of the draft categories. The allocations of transcripts to categories were compared. The process was used to create final descriptions that reflected the similarity in understanding among the transcripts allocated to each category and the differences between the categories.

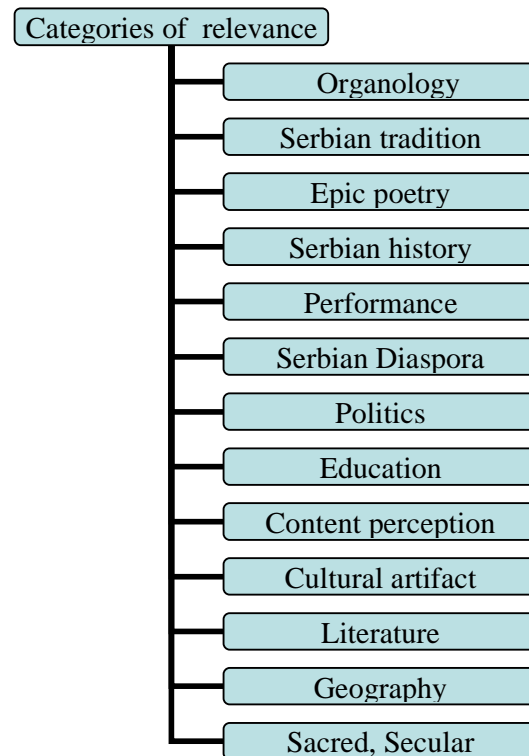


Diagram 3 Categories of relevance

The next step was to identify distinct ways of understanding the phenomenon. There are two primary mechanisms through which this may be accomplished:

1. When it is found that two expressions, which are different at the word level, reflect essentially the same meaning (that is, they are basically synonymous).
2. When two or more expressions reflect (at least) two different meanings, two ways of understanding the phenomenon may form the basis of a theme, effectively due to the effect of the contrast(s).

The analysis identifies ways that the experiencing of the phenomenon is expressed in the language of the research subject (the interviewee). In order to accomplish this it is necessary to ascertain not only what has been said but (often) what in fact has been meant, so the statement(s) must be viewed with respect to their relationship to both of these contexts (said *and* meant).

Once the comments have been grouped according to relatedness and relevance, the focus of attention is shifted from the relationships between the quotes to the relationships between the

groups. It is important to establish the key attributes of the group and the features or elements that distinguish the groups from one another.

2.7 (c) The categories of description

The categories of description reflect the main results of a phenomenographic study. Once they are found they can be re-applied to the data from which they originate with judgements being made in each individual case regarding which category(s) of description is applicable. It is then possible to obtain the distribution of the frequencies of the categories of description.

The criteria of description which emerged from interviews included the following:

1. gusle performers as the keepers of traditional Serbian cultural expression who continually rejuvenate, modify and update the gusle tradition. Koprivica stated

In gusle songs there is more history than poetry. When I was small, in my parts people learned more about history from the gusle than at school. Priests and gusle players were the only real teachers among the people. (Koprivica, 2006)

2. audience members who acknowledge that gusle performance and Serbian epic/lyric poetry are integral components of Serbian and Serbian-Australian cultural heritage. Aleksić noticed

Firstly, the gusle are liked by those villagers who had access to listening to them from a young age. Then, gusle are liked by all highly educated people, especially ethnomusicologists. The only negative answer I received was from the working class that mainly came from those parts where gusle are played. Why? Because they think that the gusle are a primitive village instrument. Because they haven't gone far from the village, but still live in the city, as not to look like villagers they say that the gusle are bad. Even so, they often listen to them. (Aleksić, 2006)

3. scholars are divided in their opinions. One group of scholars views the gusle tradition as a “stumbling block” from Serbia’s past and an impediment to its future, sometimes asserting that gusle performance traditions are perhaps best eradicated and the instruments themselves consigned to museums. A second group of scholars view gusle as a kind of a “philosopher’s stone”, arguing that if Serbs and Serbian-

Australians lose touch with the genre, a significant part of their cultural heritage and identity will be compromised irreversibly.

Nović (2006) noticed

I have placed the gusle in the museum. Someone might say that this is sacrilege and totally inappropriate putting gusle in a museum. That would mean that they are not for this real life of ours. I have an answer to this- treasure is kept in museums because gusle are our treasure. (Nović, 2006)

To this Aleksić continued

The gusle are against war. There is a common perception that gusle players encourage hate through the gusle. All is needed is to analyse the songs and to understand the real meaning of gusle. The Serbian people are not what is being interpreted today in the West. They need to look at our culture and tradition and to understand that we are not what is being presented in the world today. (Aleksić, 2006)

4. members of the Serbian Orthodox Church in Australia, constitute the core of the most homogeneous Serbian community in Australia and are undoubtedly the staunchest promoters of Christian Serbian tradition in Australia. Milutinović (2007) commented “The Serbian Orthodox Church is above all parties and encompasses the entire Serbian being. Secondly, it is the only trusted organization”.

The categories of relevance were then categories into ‘pools of meaning’ shown in diagram 4 below.

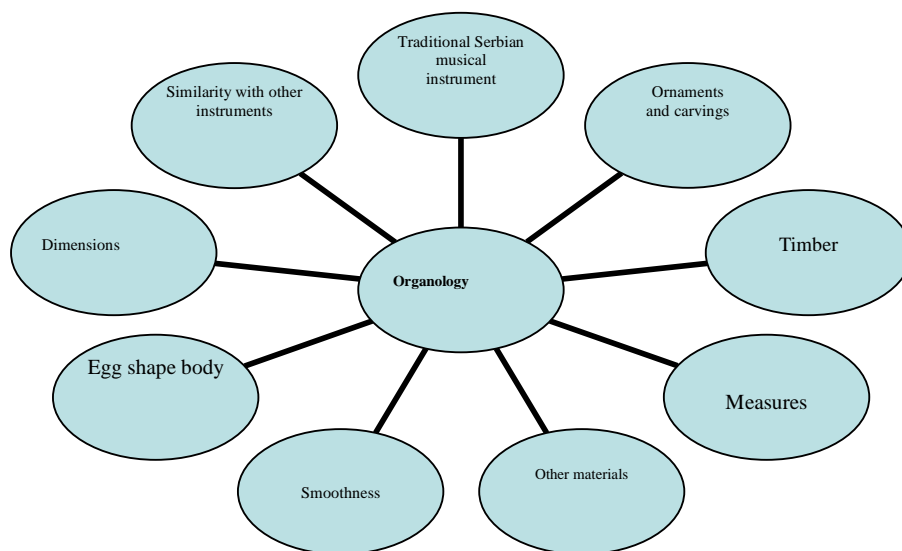


Diagram 4: Pools of meaning

The pools of meaning were then further categorised into different and similar categories as shown in diagram 5.

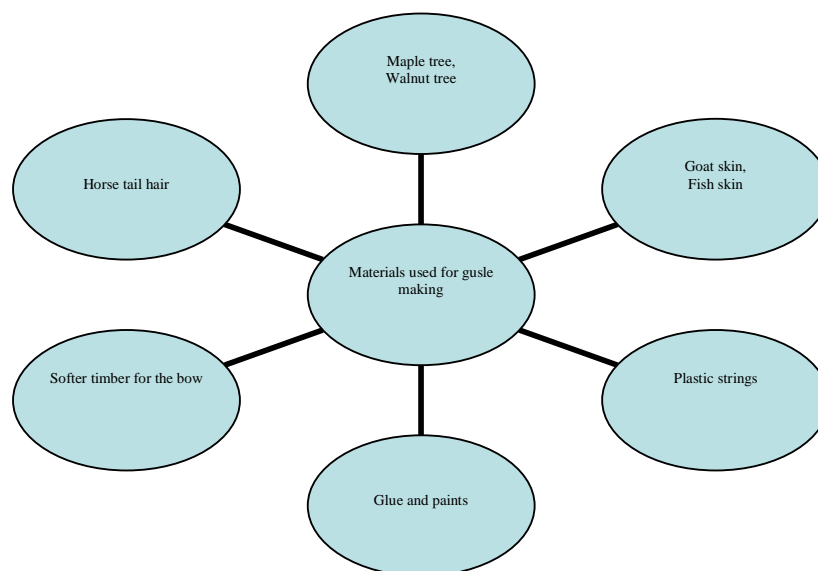


Diagram 5: Different and similar categories

This chapter has presented the approach to the analysis of the interviews and the responses to the research questions. In the following chapter I shall explore Serbian historical issues which relate to the significance of the gusle tradition.

CHAPTER THREE

SERBIAN TRADITION

3.1 Historical Background

Serbian cultural traditions evolved and were influenced by the traditions and cultures of non-Serbian peoples. As Serbs migrated with other tribes of north-central Europe (in particular, the Avars and Huns – a mixture of tribal groups from primarily the regions adjoining the Danube River), the Serbs and Sorbs expanded their range of cultural characteristics and qualities throughout several southward and south-eastward movements (Ćorović, 1989).

Each group influenced the others in terms of religion and spirituality, rites of passage, myths and legends, burial practices, food, music, and so forth, to varying degrees and across a range of domains. Prior to the Asian invasions of the Huns (4th century), the Avars (6th century) and the Magyars (10th century), there were extensive Slavic populations in the Panonian Plains (much of modern Hungary, Serbia and Croatia) and throughout much of Central Europe. Hence, the gusle type of stringed instrument was likely to have been known amongst Slavic/Illyrian peoples from ancient times. The geographical origin of this type of bowed, stringed instruments is not known (Bataković, 2000).

After several migration epochs encompassing regions from modern-day Slovakia and Ukraine, a large percentage of the population of the regions from the Danube through the Balkans were of Serb extraction. By the sixth century AD a high concentration of these people had settled in fairly close proximity to the border between the Western and Eastern ‘Roman’ empires – that is the Drina River, which separates modern-day Bosnia and Serbia (Bataković, 2000).

After settling in this border region, Serbs inherited and adopted cultural practices from the ancient civilizations of both what we now call Western Europe and the Near East. Ćorović, (1989) suggests

Serbian ethnicity continued to acquire various cultural components from others (for example, Christianity and various elements of feudalism) while at the same time, the notion of avoidance of unwanted influences from some of the cultures with which

they came into contact reached the level of being almost formalized policy. By the end of the thirteenth century through the fall of Constantinople (1453) and beyond, the avoidance of influences from other cultures became belligerent, particularly with respect to the period of regional occupation by the Ottoman Empire (the six hundred years from about 1371 to 1912). (Ćorović, 1989, p. 64)

3.2 Serbian language and migrations

During the last two thousand years, *gusle* performers have been the collectors and keepers of Serbian cultural traditions. They have also played an important role in the preservation of Slavic languages and dialects across the wide territory of Europe and Asia (Lajić-Mihailović, 2007). As this investigation includes the study of Serbian epic poetry (*pesme*), the research takes into account the importance of historical linguistic issues related to the Serbian language, especially as they relate to the history of the Serbs/Illyrians in Europe. Further, Serbian epic poetry is an important reference point in the political and cultural history and ideological education of Serbian people (Lajić-Mihailović, 2007).

The existence of epic/lyric poetry and *gusle* performance practices have been documented in Poland, Hungary and Romania during the sixteenth century AD, with the origins having been assigned as Serbian (Koprivica, 2006; Aleksić, 2006). The oldest known, recorded epic poem is dated to the fifteenth century. It was written in the 'Serbian style', the form of which is known as *bugarštica*. *Burgaštica* was widespread across the Serbian-populated territory from the Adriatic Coast to Central and Eastern Europe, and especially during the fifteenth century. Mercer Dorson (1972) suggested that the "*Bugariti* translates as "singing sadly", hence the genre is essentially a 'lament'. A particular feature of the construction of the verse and its scansion is the use of *caesura* which, although changeable, is frequently placed between the seventh and eighth syllable of sixteen, although there are examples of greater or smaller numbers of syllables, for example, twelve. There is an embryonic (grammatical) rhyme which is neither syllabic nor tonal. Of note is the ongoing debate regarding which of the syllabic orientations – *bugarštica* versus *decasyllabic* – is the older" (p. 110).

Later, details of Serbian epic and lyric poetry are explored, particularly the rhythmic and metrical structure (scansion) and its relation to the more essentially rhythmical elements of the music of *gusle*. Suffice to note at this stage is that the fresh and resonant decasyllable of

the folk songs, called the *Serbian trochée*¹, became not only an object of study but also a model for the composition of poetry. Johann von Goëthe wrote much of his love poetry in trochée (Milošević-Dorđević, 1995). Indeed, trochée became a significant poetic form in German literature and that of other, primarily central European cultures.

Decasyllabic verse or meter (in Italian: *decasillabo*) is (primarily) a poetic construct used mainly in the epic poetry of the Southern Slavs (for example, Serbian epic poetry sung to the accompaniment of the *gusle* musical instrument). Each verse has exactly ten syllables. The decasyllabic approach of most Serbian epic poetry includes a *caesura* after the fifth syllable. Caesura (or ‘pause’) is also related to the rhythmic nature of *gusle* performance, constituting a break in the rhythm as per a ‘half cadence’ within a melodic phrase.

3.3 Oral tradition

The first records of Serbian cultural oral tradition are traceable to the early- to mid-fifteenth century. This approximate date has been established via the subject matter of epic poetry and songs, especially material focused upon Tsar Dušan (who ruled over most of the Balkans from 1331-1355), the Battle of Maritza (1371), the Battle of Kosovo (1389) as well as some folk material generally viewed as pre-dating, by perhaps two generations. Bataković (2000) states:

During the Ottoman occupation, the centres of Serbian literacy (the aristocracy and the church) were suppressed from the outset. As a result, transfer of knowledge, history and culture became, by necessity, nested in oral traditions, especially amongst the general population of essentially similar cultural and religious backgrounds. By and large, the poorest sectors of the population, those primarily from the rural and agrarian areas of the region/country (the peasantry), gradually became the mainstay of the handing-on of knowledge, history and culture via what is now referred to as an “oral tradition”. (Bataković, 2000, p. 110)

By the late-fifteenth century, devastated Serbian cities were rebuilt in the Ottoman style and became the centres of Ottoman and indeed some Oriental cultural traditions in that part of Europe. For example, today Kruševac (the former capital of Serbia) and most of the older

¹ A trochée is a poetic device known as a foot consisting of one long followed by one short syllable.

cities throughout Kosovo and Macedonia (for example, Novo Brdo, Zvečan and Skopje,) include significant zones featuring Ottoman architecture and various other cultural influences (for example, cuisine). From the late-fifteenth to early-sixteenth centuries the richness of the Serbian oral tradition becomes increasingly evident (Ćorović, 1989).

During my research I have noticed that *pesme*, as an aspect of oral transmission constituting the oral history of the people, was transferred *s'kolena na koleno* (literally “from the knee to the knee”). Due to the oral (rather than written) nature of its transfer, changes by singers (primarily) to the specifics of the content of the *pesme* were of course very likely, whether intentional or unintentional. Indeed, it was possible (perhaps probable) that some “customers” (aristocracy, patrons, politicians, etc.) even requested changes in the songs with the purpose of the work(s) supporting their personal (or collective) objectives, perspectives, vanity, etc. In addition to the ruling class being possible (or probable) “correctors” of the text where some elements close to (or from within) the church which, at the time and for centuries, virtually controlled state and national literacy.

Both lyric and epic poetry with its specific structural elements lead into a creation of formalized types and styles of delivery, from the sixteen syllables oral tradition – *Bugarštica*, via decasyllable and the more recent octosyllable performance style. Many of these works include musical accompaniment, whether they are specifically songs or musically underscored narratives. With respect to the accompanied narratives (mostly epic poetry), without exception the musical instrument used was the *gusle*.

In the period from the mid-15th to mid-19th centuries, songs, tales and poetry from the oral tradition continued to be the primary creative outlet amongst the majority of Serbs. This was primarily because formalised learning was suppressed by the occupiers throughout the period. As a result, Serbs created a broad and rich legacy of poetry, prose and music, virtually all of which is rooted in an oral tradition (Milošević-Đorđević, 1995).

3.4 Musical developments

The exclusive use of *bugarštica* for works of poetry had a profound effect upon the nature of the musical and rhythmic motifs and themes of the musical accompaniments.

Parallel to the development in poetry was the ongoing creation and development of a repertoire of songs. Most of these were likewise *bugarštica* and featured topics similar to the poetry – that is, primarily heroic and historical and essentially of the epic genre (Milošević-Dorđević, 1995).

In 1878, jurist and law historian Baltazar Bogišić (1834-1908) edited and published *Narodne pjesme iz starijih, najviše primorskih zapisa* (National songs from the older, more coastal records). Songs from this collection were delivered in *bugarštica*. Extant written examples date from the sixteenth, seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, created and transcribed by poets mostly from the coastal regions of modern Croatia (Dalmatia in particular) and the Adriatic islands.

The almost complete disappearance of *bugarštica* as a formalised poetic construct is generally dated as some stage in the eighteenth century. As Bogišić observed: “The lack of precision regarding the dating of its demise is because lyric (non-historical) poetry is difficult to date exactly and, furthermore, it is often not possible to establish the exact chronology of works in any case, especially since so many were indeed transcriptions of much older, oral-based opuses” (Bogišić, 1878, p. 122).

The onset of the golden age of decasyllabic Serbian poetry aligns with the inception of European Romanticism. In 1814 in Vienna, Vuk Stefanović Karadžić (1787–1864) published the first systemized collection of Serbian folk songs under the name *Mala prostonarodna Slaveno-Serbska pesnarica* (a small simple-folk Slavo-Serbian song book). Through his friendship with the Vienna-based Slovenian censor for Slavonic publications Jernej Kopitar, also Karadžić’s patron and advisor, the collection of Serbian folk (mainly epic) poetry found its way to a larger readership throughout much of Europe and the USA.

By 1825, Therese Albertine Luis von Jakob-Talvi (1797-1869) translated a further 250 Serbian lyric and epic poems into German. In her comparative study of Karadžić's books in 1833, she claimed that the publication of collections of Serbian folk songs was “one of the most significant literary events of modern times” (quoted in Milošević-Dorđević, 1995, p. 36).

According to Serbian gusle performers Slavko Aleksić and Đorđije Koprivica:

The von Jakob-Talvi (German) translations were subsequently translated into English by Sir John Bowring (later governor of Hong Kong), into French by Elisa Voiiar, into Swedish by the Finnish poet Johan Ludwig Runeberg and into Russian by Pushkin (Alexandr Sergeevich Puskin, 1799-1837). In his *La Guzla* of 1827, Prosper Mérimée – the French playwright known mainly for the novella *Carmen*, the basis of the libretto for Georges Bizet's opera – presented ballads about various mystical themes, translated from the original Illyrian language (the traditional name for modern-day Serbo-Croatian) under the pseudonym Hyacinthe Maglanowich. These ballads had considerable influence throughout Eastern Europe and Russia, translated numerous times into Russian, notably by Pushkin and Mikhail Yuryevich Lermontov (1814-1841). (Koprivica & Aleksić, 2006, p. 26)

Serbian oboist Borislav Čičovački recorded:

It was not only the European poets who were interested in the Serbian folk material; many European composers found their inspiration from the genre and its metric constructs as well. Over 20 composers, mostly from Germany and Russia, but also from the Czech Republic, Poland, Switzerland and Sweden, wrote around 80 works for solo voice and choir utilising Serbian epic and lyric (folk) poetry. (Čičovački, 2009)

This quote shows when and how the Serbian epic poetry found their way to the wider European audience during the nineteenth century. These provide the initial information to the reader but also it leads to the pathways for future researchers showing that some of the most respectable European poets and composers have realised the potential and artistic value of Serbian epic poetry.

3.5 Themes in Epic poetry

The topics of Serbian epic poetry are divided into categories, generally referred to as “cycles” (Đurić, 1977). These include:

- non-historical

- works from before The Battle of Kosovo (1389)
- works about The Battle of Kosovo
- The Marko Kraljević cycle
- The Branković and Jakšić family's cycle
- The Crnojević family cycle
- The Ugričica (Hungarians) and The Hrvaćani (Croatian) heroes cycle
- The Haiduks (Central Rebels) cycle
- The Uskoks (Coastal Rebels) cycle
- The Muslim cycle
- The liberation of Montenegro cycle
- The liberation of Serbia cycle.

A different system of categorisation was presented by Vuk Karadžić (1845) into the following:

- Old works (from before the times of the Haiduks and the Uskoks)
- Middle works (about the times of the Haiduks and the Uskoks)
- New works (about the liberation of Serbia and Montenegro). (Đurić, 1977, p. 24)

The elements and components from within these three groups are intertwined. As a general principle, *Old Works* (also known as “Songs of the old times”) were placed in the category (by Karadžić) because they were created long after the events upon which they were based or that they seek to describe and, importantly, are essentially apocryphal and heroic rather than historically reliable. The historical and societal integrity of the two other categories (*Middle* and *New Works*) is greater. It is of some interest that, in addition to songs of historical accounts – especially of battles and similar conflagrations – topics about the problems of ordinary life are commonly included and often provided great importance within the works, notably descriptions of the difficulties of women and various issues regarding religion. Indeed, virtually all works from these two later categories contain segments focused upon societal issues, even those whose topics are essentially about conflict (Đurić, 1977).

3.6 Early forms

The roots of epic poetry are ancient and formalised. Elements of epic songs are in the earliest forms of literary/historical expression, especially in dirges, traditional toasts, myths and fairytales. In particular, the characters and foci of epic poems were the basis of accounts of stories and events related to heroic deeds, particularly regarding war. Often adjoined with mythological elements and similar in content to children's tales/fairytales (heroes, moral examples, supernatural or special, hyperbole, etc.) over time epic poems/songs became a stylised genre with similarities of content and form.

Of particular use to historical and cultural evaluations, the epic poems/songs usually include mention of events and personalities from the past. This allows for the dating of events and establishing lineages, interaction with other cultures, transfer of art and technology (especially technologies of war), and so forth. As then, war and war technologies are significant elements of many modern economies. As an example, legend has it that nineteenth century Montenegrins implored their King Nikola I (1841-1921): "dear Lord, make war please. We are getting poor" (from an interview with Slavko Aleksić, Belgrade, October 2006).

3.7 Colonisation

During the period of Ottoman rule (ranging from 1389 - 1912, depending on the region) the primary desire of Serbian people was the re-establishment of an independent and united Serbian state. This aspiration fostered considerable dialogue and debate across the Serbian populations with much of these discussion formalised in nationalistic *pesme* that featured issues of hope and faith in freedom and unification. Many epic works of the era presented themes of revolution and rebellion, both historical and contemporary, and commonly included nationalist sentiments and entreaties for future insurrection through Serbia and the central Balkans. Another common theme was the desire for a return to a state of peace once the people had attained their freedom and independence.

It is important to remember that the performance of Serbian nationalistic epic poetry was prohibited by the occupying Ottomans (Bataković, 2000). In the cities, Serbian gusle were clandestinely performed only, flourishing primarily in rural environments. The only gusle that the Ottomans allowed officially to be performed was that of the "Muslim style" wherein Islamic heroes and legends were the focus. Notably, the audiences of these "sanctioned"

performances of works in the Muslim style were in fact Serbs that were converted to Islam. During the occupation (especially the 15th to 18th centuries) there was a policy of taking young Serbian boys (especially village and rural) away from their families, educating them as Muslims and in the Islamic traditions and making them soldiers. These *Janichars*, as they were called, were noted as being among the most formidable of the “National Guard” armies throughout the whole of the Ottoman Empire. Sanctioned Muslim-style *guslar* was predominantly performed for the Janichars as the epic poems were presented in a performance mode (and the language) with which that audience was familiar, relating back to early childhood in their villages (Golemović, 2008).

During the Ottoman occupation many people (including some of the nobility) either deserted or betrayed their Serbian heritage. Commonly this was from fear of execution or imprisonment, but also because of greed and self-interest. (It is important to remember that, in some parts of the Ottoman empire, by about the 17th century the Ottomans required that, with rare exception, all public servants and seneschals be Muslim.) Considering the subsequent desertion by many of their leaders and stalwarts and without help from their Christian brothers elsewhere in Europe, many Serbs felt all that remained were themselves, a god (or gods), fairies and sprites, demons and dragons. This outlook resulted in Serbian folk heroes (especially those featured in *pesme*) were almost always endowed with supernatural characteristics, no doubt reflecting the perspective that the deeds, skills and characteristics of Serbian warriors (for example) were greater than those that their enemies could ever have. Heroes were presented as the embodiment of the deepest feelings of the populace, especially with respect to a desire for freedom and both cultural and national re-unification.

Two examples from *pesme* illustrating Serbian views of the Ottoman occupation are:

I would rather die with you in honour, than kiss the Turks in shame.

(from the *Death of Duke Prijezda*), (Đurić, 1977)

Raise a son and send him to the army - Serbia cannot be soothed (any longer)

(from *The Battle of Mishar*). (Đurić, 1977)

3.8 The role of Vuk Stefanović Karadžić

Vuk Karadžić is generally accepted as the pioneer of the formal, theoretical and literary-historical study of Serbian folk literature. Karadžić set the foundation for much of the

subsequent research, receiving affirmation in the works of several foreign scientists. Milman Parry and Albert Lord researched the tradition in the first half of the twentieth century. They were materially, technically, academically and technologically well-equipped for their research into Serbian national creativity. (Parry and Lord used tape recorders and both were academic linguists.) They used scientific research, analysis and reporting methods to establish much of the basis for further formal investigations by Serbian and foreign academics, linguists, scientists, cultural historians and nationalists. The role of Serbian national singers (*guslari*) became the subject of considerable research during the 1930s. In particular, Serbian scientists and ethnographers such as V. M. Jovanović, N. Banasević, S. Matić, V. Latković, and V. Nedić all used the works of Vuk Karadžić as their starting point (Nedić, 1990, p. 5).

Studying the role of individual singers highlights various similarities and differences in performance and approaches to traditional narrative transfer. The works published by Karadžić are in simple and clear vernacular and the nature of virtually all of his analysis is likewise straightforward. Almost certainly this is because his favourite narrators and *guslari* wrote/performed works in an essentially straightforward, vernacular style. It is difficult to verify whether or not the bards that Karadžić recorded and published were the epitome of transmitters of Serbian oral tradition especially with respect to issues of poetic “elegance” and “formalism”. While it is possible that the very best were indeed found and included, it is also possible that they were not; because Karadžić travelled around the countryside encountering and recording narrators/performers wherever he found them. He could not go everywhere and hear every narrator and *guslar*, hence there is no way to ascertain the relative standards of Karadžić’s renderings in this sense. With respect to the *guslari* (singers/musicians) in particular, Karadžić highlighted and indeed elevated considerably the awareness of their role and significance by his recording (writing and publishing) and subsequent formal analysis of Serbian epic poetry.

In his analytical approach, Karadžić endeavoured to highlight the importance of the *guslari* (folk singers) by recording many performance of the same narrative, performed by a range of singers as well as focusing upon the creativity and nuances of specific individuals. In this way his analyses could highlight the role of individuals within an essentially “group” creation. A feature of his style of analysis was to compare all of the versions of the (essentially) same narrative to the one which he considered to be somehow “best” or most

authentic. (This is certainly a value judgement but, nevertheless, a useful point of departure in an analytical context.) Notably, it was rare for Karadžić to comment about the strictly musical performance standards of the *guslari* he recorded (quality of singing, instrumental technique, control, fluency, etc.) although musical performers were the artists that he preferred to hear and record. This preference is probably because Karadžić grew up in a village and was surrounded by (and arguably immersed in) folk traditions and cultural creativity. Taught by his cousin Jefto Savić, who was only literate person in the village he began to learn to read and write when fairly young, evidently from about five or six years of age (Popović, 2001). He continued his education in private school *Loznica* (1795), and later in the monastery of Tronoša (1796) (Popović, 2001).

As mentioned above, Karadžić had a preference for *guslari*, usually placing those he heard as the best among the best and pointing out their individual roles from within the context of a kind of comprehensive group creativity. In the preface of the first book of folk songs (1824) Karadžić explains his position: “a bad singer memorises a good song in a bad way and so transfers the song in a bad way, (whereas) a good singer is able to fix even a bad song according to his skills”. Karadžić believed that more experienced singers can move beyond the phase or domain of narrative creativity and to the creation of a song – a creative undertaking of a higher “order”.

In the preface of the Leipzig edition of the first book of *Serbian folk songs* (1824), Karadžić stated his position regarding the characteristics of and processes for creating a folk song: “Every man who knows fifty different songs (if he is born for the art) should (be able to) create a new song – (because) it is normal for him”. During his years of trekking and recording, Karadžić gained substantial insight such that he could appreciate and understand when (in their careers) were capable of and tended to move from the replicative phase to the creative phase of *guslar* “composition”. Significantly, in the years following his work (and especially in the twentieth century), Vuk Karadžić’s methodology formed the basis for many studies and quantitative analyses in the field of linguistic ethnography, with subsequent studies of Serbian opuses having confirmed Karadžić’s perspectives and insights (Nedić, 1990, p. 7).

3.9 The hidden meanings of the Serbian epic poetry

Beauty of expression and the special attention afforded to descriptions of human and moral traits are valued characteristics of Serbian epic poetry. Often from within a trance-like state, *pesme* bards (*guslari*) present historical and societal accounts that commonly feature stylised hyperbole; for example, tales of the very mighty who are often portrayed as larger than life and usually more (militarily) skilled and morally, ethically and intellectually ‘better’ than in fact they were. In my view, with this approach, the *guslar* fires the dreams and imagination of a downtrodden people craving for positive self-image, social and nationalistic cohesion, and, indeed, the miracle of freedom from enslavement.

Accomplished *guslari* place highly significant terms at important points within their *pesme* and repeat them numerous times, both for structural cohesion and to enhance the impact and dynamic of the work and their singing. Fixed epithet and comparison are common structural devices with comparisons couched as conflict, contrast or both. Compared, for example, were Serbian heroes and their enemies, Latin and Serbian monasteries, girls and women, old and young, joy and sorrow, and so forth. In my view, the use of contrast was used stylistically to present differing perspectives, positions and contexts.

The *pesma* “Uroš I Mrnjavčevići” (“Uroš and Mrnjavčević family”) contrasts the blessed with the accursed. A Serbian King cursed his son Marko because he joined Turkish army while Turkish Sultan celebrates Marko’s decision and according to that the Sultan is giving a blessing to his new vassal.

And in wrath he (the King) cursed him:

“(My) Son Marko, may God slay thee,

Mayest thou have neither grave nor posterity,

And may thy soul not leave thee

Until thou hast served the Turkish Sultan!”

(While) the King (his father) cursed him, the Tsar (Sultan) blessed him:

“Marko, my godson, may God be thy stay!

May thy face shine in the council chamber!

May thy sword be sharp in the battle!

May no knight be found to put thee to the worse!

Be thy name renowned everywhere,

*Whilst sun and moon endure!”
Thus they spoke, curse and blessing,
And so also it came to pass.*

The use of repetition is of considerable importance in *pesme*. *Guslari* use it as an emphasizing device to highlight the most important segments of the *pesma*, and as a point of departure for modifications, especially segue to related issues or ancillary accounts. Although such repetition might be viewed as monotonous, more often it is considered an artistically beautiful form of expression, especially given its significance as a pervasive structural device and organisational principle. Positioned at pivotal places in the *pesme*, repeated passages often herald main events, inject anticipation, heighten expectations, highlight axioms or universal truths, preface homilies, and so forth. It is argued that the greater the use of such repeated phrases or passages, the more dynamic the work and, therefore, the more interesting it is to hear. Further, when the repeated passage features rhyme, it is argued that the vividness of the work, its expressiveness and, indeed, the effectiveness of its vocal and instrumental performance are all enhanced noticeably (Đurić, 1977).

Rhyme is utilised less commonly in *pesme* than in formally-written poetry, although from time to time rhyme is indeed used in works from various oral traditions, especially for purposes of metric accent and to highlight a point or image. It is maintained that the uncertain and inconsistent use of rhyme in many epic works (especially *pesme*) is a significant characteristic that makes substantial contributions to the beauty and symmetry of the works. There are numerous examples of *pesme* where the use of rhyme seems to be avoided intentionally as well as works where rhyme is used only essentially to enhance the momentum and indeed somehow “refresh” or enliven the work.

These examples show the constant presence of human values which were the base of the family and the society of that time. The faith, trust, honesty, patriotism are just a few elements always attached to the main roles in the songs, showing the human qualities of the hero. If the artist supports those qualities with some comparisons the result might lead to the supernatural characteristics of the hero.

Petar II Petrović-Njegoš, (Петар II Петровић-Његош) was a Serbian Orthodox Prince-Bishop (Vladika) of Montenegro and a ruler who transformed Montenegro from a theocracy

into a secular state. However, he is most famous as a poet and is considered by many to be among the greatest poets of the Serbian language and a national poet of the Serbs of Montenegro. In his most popular work *Gorski Vijenac* (The Mountain Wreath), he wrote “na gusle se strune pokidaše” (literal translation: ‘on the gusle the strands of the string broke (one by one)’ (Petrović, 1847).

It is interesting to recall that gusle strings are comprised of approximately 50 strands of a horse tail twisted into a single string, similar to twine. A single line of any poem cannot depict completely the significance and implications of the moment. However, it is important for one to understand the degree of significance of this single, five-word phrase.

With this phrase Njegoš is, firstly, anticipating the tragedy to come. Furthermore (and very significantly) the notion of the strand of the gusle’s string come apart one by one is here being used both allegorically and metaphorically to signify both the life and the lifeblood of the Serbian people. In addition, there is an implication that if not a Serb, there would be no one else who would (or could) play the gusle and sing the *pesme* (epic poetry) in the traditional manner of the authentic Serbian style. In order for one to gain a clearer perspective apropos the essence and implications of this single line, below is presented an English translation of the whole stanza where it is presented, so as to ascertain the significance of the phrase with respect to its relationship to the remainder of the stanza, its metaphor and allegory, and, especially, the high degree of importance placed upon both the gusle’s string and the instrument itself as Serbian nationalistic and cultural icons.

KOLO

A dark, thick cloud had covered the sun.
 Darkness settled upon the mountain high.
 The votive lamp cried before the altar,
 One by one broke the strings of the gusle.
 The fair vilas* took to hiding in caves,
 Fearing greatly both the sun and the moon.
 Chests had turned cold of many valiant men,
 And liberty had disappeared in them,
 As the sun's rays die out on the mountain
 When the sun sets in the sea's horizon.

O, our dear Lord, what a bright holiday!
 O how the souls of our dear forefathers
 Are hovering over Cetinje now!
 They are dancing together in white flocks,
 Like the flocks of beautiful snow-white swans
 As they sail high in the cloudless sky
 Above the lake and its shining mirror.
 The five falcons, the five Martinović 's,
 Who all nourished at one maternal breast,
 Lulled to sleep in the same wooden cradle,
 The two Novaks with Pima, the flag-man,
 And the valiant knight, Vuk Borilović –
 You who first struck at the infidel Turks –
 Who'll be able to wreath garlands for you?
 A monument to your bravery is
 Montenegro and its proud liberty!

* *vilas* – fairies

(Mountain Wreath by Petar Petrović Njegoš - Translation by V. D. Mihailovich)

It might be that some of the *guslari* between the fifteenth and twentieth centuries have ascribed to the principal theme of *The Prince* – perhaps the most famous of the works of the Italian philosopher, author, poet, statesman and musician Niccolò di Bernardo dei Machiavelli (1469-1527) – “the end justify the means”. That is that all means may be resorted to for the establishment and preservation of authority, even the alteration of facts, in order to serve or preserve the interests of a “higher good”. As the people needed instruction (ranging from historical to cultural to spiritual) it was the practice that the educative materials would be constantly modified to suit the political, social and economic situation(s) of the era. Indeed, as it was in the past it remains in recent times.

3.10 Serb Christianity and heroes

Reference to the supernatural qualities of heroes harks back to the beliefs and romance of pre-Christian times. Some pagan practices are present in a variety of traditional rites of the Serbian people to this day, although culturally disguised to a fair degree. Remnants of Serbian pre-Christian paganism among the Christian Serbs are found in the special way that

the practices are expressed, these differing noticeably from such practices in other Balkan cultures and, indeed, virtually all other Christian cultures. For example, Serbian *Slava* (“celebrate” also “glory”) is a significant traditional ritual celebration featuring veneration and observance of a family’s own patron saint. In this fairly unique form of access to Christian faith is the incorporation of hardly-veiled pagan polytheism. The principal feature of *Slava* is Christian saints being endowed with the supernatural powers and domains of pagan deities.

Serbian epic songs and lyric songs (essentially love songs) both feature and essentially glorify Serbian heroes and, commonly, heroes from other lands/cultures as well. Almost without exception the treatment of heroes from other cultures and Serbian heroes are similar if not the same (noble, ethical, brave, etc.), with “other” heroes often given Serbian names (for example, Sibirjanin Janko and Banović Strahinja).

Vuk Karadžić located and compiled folk literature from areas where Serbs dominated the population and it is, therefore, understandable that he called such works “Serbian songs”. Within this class of epic works are examples of ethnic Serb *pesnici* who, having converted to Islam due to pressure from the ruling Ottomans, created a substantial body of work that features Muslim warriors and heroes. Within their *pesme*, Croat *pesnici* have likewise included topics, issues and events from the times of their (regional) occupation (by the Turks, the Venetians, the Austrians, the Hungarians and the Austro-Hungarians). Noticeable in numerous Croat songs from the period of the Old Works are references to the same Serbian heroes and warriors (for example, Stojan Janković – a Serb from Dalmatia and even Marko Kraljević – a Serb from Macedonia) and not uncommonly these characters are depicted as being “of their own” (Croatian).

Despite an array of regional and (sub-) cultural themes and foci, the style/manner of the narration was, labelled by those who occupied Serbian lands as “Serbian” leaving little doubt to the ethnic and cultural origins of the narrative style of *pesme*. After the fall of Bosnia (1463) and Herzegovina (1482) to the Ottomans, a very large number of Serbs left those regions and migrated north-westerly to modern-day Croatia. With a view to attaining a “better life” many of these Serbs, generally with direct and formal support from the Austrians, Hungarians and Venetians, converted to the Roman Catholic faith but, nevertheless, continued to embrace the literary, artistic and cultural cohesiveness of Serbian

national narration (*pesme*) (Bataković, 2000, pp.128). Hence, *pesme* (and *gusle*) remains a recognizable form of cultural expression among the Catholic, (Eastern) Orthodox and Muslim peoples of Serbian origin.

Themes related to changes of religion throughout the broader Serbian peoples have always permeated Serbian epic poetry. Located between (essentially) Roman Catholic Europe and Ottoman Islam, Eastern Orthodox Serbia (from the 16th century) was under constant religious pressure, targeted for conversion not only to Roman Catholicism but, no less and at various times more aggressively, to Islam. Arguably as a result of such institutionalized pressures regarding conversion to three often very dogmatic religious affiliations, many of the “core” problems and sufferings of the Serbian peoples were (and often remain) largely hidden and ostensibly diluted and mitigated. From the mid-eighteenth century to the present day, almost all Catholic Serbs have become “Croatsians” while the Muslims Serbs have created a borderless nation based upon their religion (Bataković, 2000).

3.11 Gusle patriotism

Epic songs live in certain historical and social conditions. This is why, within the poetics, the epic song is viewed as a steadfast standard; as a conditionally-based stylistic form, sustaining ideals of heroism within the broader construct of artistic beauty. “The core of the Serbian epic song (the *Old Songs*) in itself carries a certain fingerprint of the environment, within which is imprinted the ideology and style of life from (essentially) the higher layers of feudal society. (Hence) Serbian epic is primarily a poetry of the military aristocracy, commonly created in conditions where heroism was an integral part of life, (such that the content and constructs) of (these) epic songs present and foster the notions of nationalism and independence” (Kravtsov, 1960, p. 54).

According to Kravtsov, Serbian epic poetry belongs *exclusively* to the military aristocracy, given that most of the narratives feature heroes that were wealthy (and titled) and who existed in social situations outside the domains of ‘ordinary’ people. These epic songs present military occupation, personal and societal survival and war itself as “ways of life”. Within this context, heroes are generally either part of or related to the ruling class and are portrayed as personifying the virtues and attributes of the ruling class.

It is during this time of the *Old Songs* (12th to 15th centuries) that the skills of *guslari* in using pagan elements to depict the feudal system in a manner that could be used to support the ruling class become apparent. Interpretations (that is, performances) are presented to be acts of unification between the people and the ruling class, primarily aimed at evoking positive reactions by the people to the feudal system. Within this context, the role of *guslari* with respect to fostering and advancing patriotism was significant. Associating directly with the people, the *guslari* provided not only patriotic/nationalistic “entertainment”, but also delivered news and general information, packaged within the *pesme*. Within their songs are contained an array of elements necessary for the re-awakening of cultural consciousness and patriotic feelings within the population of the time. For example, this stanza features Prince Lazar (the hero/narrator) exploiting cultural consciousness to stir patriotism.

*Whoever is a Serb and of Serb birth,
And of Serb blood and heritage,
And comes not to fight at Kosovo,
May he never have the progeny his heart desires,
Neither son nor daughter!
May nothing grow that his hand sows,
Neither dark wine nor white wheat!
And let him be cursed from all ages to all ages!*
(The Battle of Kosovo, Bacon, 1913)

The issuance of a prospective curse seeks to address a fear that certain strata of the population will not respond to the call.

Even though the principal characters in virtually all *pesme* are heroic individuals, the works manage to incorporate the roles of common people, whether as individuals or as a group. Often, one of the characters within a work in fact represents “the people”, so that the image and significance of, for example, mass losses on the battlefield is highlighted and chronicled.

Guslari also sing about negative, flawed and unpopular figures from Serbian history. For example, unsuccessful warriors, unscrupulous leaders, law breakers, traitors, persons of questionable ethics and morality, etc. sometimes feature in the works of the *Guslari*, described in ways intended to provoke the animosity and hostility of the populace. Notable,

nevertheless, is that most *Guslari* deal positively with some foreign heroes (those with “worthy” virtues, especially) although their virtues and positive attribute are generally depicted as being slightly less worthy of praise than those of the domestic heroes/fighters/sages. In this way, the abilities and attainments of local heroes are brought to the fore and their victories, for example, reached the status of “glorious”.

3.12 Gusle in politics

The origins of the political underpinnings of gusle tradition can be found in all of the Old Songs – those from the earliest times – which found their basis in the struggle for liberation (in every sense: social, political, ethnic, religious, etc.), particularly via political activities. Throughout the history of *pesme*, the gusle itself has presented symbols and ornaments (for example, a large, carved eagle at the top, faces of Serbian heroes, Serbian coats of arms, etc.) which serve to emphasize and enhance the primarily nationalistic elements of gusle songs, especially as these convey strong images and contexts related to social cohesion and unity. The gusle, therefore, “speaks” not only as a device for presenting music but also as an image to observe and inspire. In his article *Gusle i guslari* Vladimir Karakašević (1898) writes:

Rarely will (one) find an instrument which is so powerfully impressed on the development of music, art and poetry on the one hand, (combining) these with social and political events on the other hand, as did the gusle”. “Analysing only the latest political history, (for example) the struggle for liberation from the Turks under (Aleksandar) Karadjordjević and Miloš Obrenović, we immediately get a clear picture of the impact and importance of national(istic) gusle poetry (with respect to) political events. (Karakašević, 1898, p. 11).

According to Nobel Prize winner Ivo Andrić, the *gusle* depicts the collective spirit of the mountain people “those people (who) paid for their happiness (with their) souls” (Radanović, 2003, p. 11).

CHAPTER FOUR

THE EXPERIENCE OF MIGRATION IN THE SERBIAN – AUSTRALIAN DIASPORA COMMUNITIES

In this chapter I shall explore data related to Serbian migrations to Australia, the establishment of Serbian Orthodox church in Australia and the significance of the Serbian church to the Serbian-Australian Diaspora. Before discussing the topic of migration and the Serbian-Australian communities it is important to note the role of the Serbian Orthodox Church and its significance to my study.

The Orthodox stream of Christianity developed from the church's spread across the eastern Roman, or Byzantine Empire in the first few centuries after Christ. It was influenced more by Greek culture and language than Roman, and over the centuries relations between the two power bases – Constantinople and Rome – grew more tense over political and theological differences. In 1054, the Great Schism – resulting from disagreements over the Roman Pope's claim to supremacy and the doctrine of the Holy Spirit – led to the split between the Eastern Church (centred in Constantinople, now Istanbul) and the Western Church (centred in Rome). The Eastern Church spread northwards into Russia and Slavic countries (ABC, 2011).

The Serbs converted to Christianity prior to The Great Schism of 1054AD. The various Serbian principalities were united ecclesiastically in the early 13th century by Rastko Nemanjić, who became known as Sava and later canonized as Saint Sava, the first Serbian saint. Nemanjić was the son of the Serbian ruler Stefan Nemanja who founded the Serbian medieval state and a brother of Stefan Prvovenčani the first King of Raška (now Serbia, northern Macedonia [‘Old Serbia’], and the eastern sections Metohija & Kosovo). Significantly, Saint Sava persuaded the Ecumenical Patriarch of Constantinople to establish the Church in Serbia as an autocephalous body with Sava himself as its archbishop. This was agreed to in 1219AD. Subsequently, the status of the Serbian Orthodox Church grew along with the growth in size and prestige of the medieval kingdom of the Serbs (Raška – ancient name of Serbian state, nowadays a region in modern Serbia).

The fall of Constantinople (the eastern capital of the Christian Empire and seat of the Eastern Orthodox Papacy) to the Ottoman Turks in 1453AD ushered in a new era for the Eastern

Orthodox churches: an era of domination by the Islamic conquerors. During this domination, the church and church membership became a focal point for the people in Orthodox centres, especially regarding the maintenance of spiritual and national identities and the preservation of local languages and cultures. Even today to be a member of the Orthodox Church means more than simply accepting a set of religious axioms and principles; almost without exception, the various Orthodox denominations virtually define or encapsulate regional, national, social and cultural identities. The opposing elements of Islam and the Eastern Orthodox Churches have been in almost continuous conflict since the 15th century (Bataković, 2000).

By 1459 the Ottomans had conquered most of Serbia and made much of the former kingdom a *pashaluk* (*Pashaluk*, *Pashalic* or *Pashalik* (from the Turkish: *Paşalık*) a term derived from *pasha* – a high-ranking position within the administrative hierarchy of the Ottoman Empire, similar to governor – and denotes the quality, office or jurisdiction of a pasha or the territory administered by him. Belgrade pashaluk was an administrative unit of the Ottoman Empire. The Pashalik of Belgrade included the Serbian lands south of the Danube and Sava rivers (Ćorović, 1989). In the late 18th and early 19th centuries the Pashalik of Belgrade was the center of the Serbian liberation struggle. It was here that in 1804 a massive anti-Turkish rebellion broke out, which laid the basis for the restoration of an independent Serbian state (Merriam-Webster, 2005 p. 1688). During the period of Turkish occupation many Serbs throughout the Balkans converted to Islam, both to avoid the oppressive taxation regimes imposed by the Turks in retaliation for Serbian uprisings and continued resistance and, in particular, to increase the likelihood that they or (especially) their children could work within the civil and administrative bureaucracy of the *Paşalık*. Together with the aristocracy, many Serbs migrated to regions under the control of the Habsburg Dynasty of Austria-Hungary where the (former) Serbian rulers were frequently bestowed a fair degree of jurisdictional autonomy.

After more than four hundred years of Ottoman occupation, in 1879 the Serbian Orthodox Church within Serbia regained its independence and became autocephalous once more. This occurred the year after the recognition of Serbia as an independent state by the Great Powers of Europe: Britain, France, Italy, Austria-Hungary and, reluctantly, Russia. Clearly, Serbian Orthodoxy is inextricably linked with Serbian national identity (Ćorović, 1989).

4.1 The Serbian Orthodox Church in Australia

There are currently 3.5 million Serbs in Diaspora communities throughout the world (Serbian Ministry of Religion and Diaspora, 2011). According to the Australian Bureau of Statistics (2006), 95,364 Serbs were recorded as living in Australia. One of the substantive issues in the Serbian Orthodox Church in Australia is the internal mission work of the Church towards her members. The external mission of the Church is to work with and reach out to those Serbs who are not of its membership. For Serbs in Australia the Serbian Orthodox Church of Australia is seen, by the official Serbian government and the members of Serbian-Australian Diaspora, as the centre of Serbian culture, education and intellectual discourse. Thus the Serbian Orthodox Church of Australia forms a kind of hub, not only for Orthodox Serbs but also members of other (primarily) Christian denominations of Southern and Central Europe. Among most Serbs in Melbourne, the Serbian Orthodox Church of Australia is viewed as the only representative voice for Serbs in Victoria and in Australia. Even when some Serbs do not agree with particular elements of religious doctrine, they nevertheless respect and generally obey the mandates and policies of the Serbian Orthodox Church of Australia. This reflects deference to the role that the Church has played throughout Serbian history, especially as an enduring defender of Serbian culture and identity. In this way most Serbs consider that the Serbian Orthodox Church is the principal representative and defender of Serbian national unity (Spasović & Miletić, 2008).

The Serbian Orthodox Church of Australia is populated by immigrants. Indeed, the migrant factor has characterised the Church's presence in Australia. The Serbian Orthodox Church was established in Australia for the spiritual and pastoral care of Serbian Orthodox Christians who chose to make their lives a long way from their Eastern European roots. The influx of displaced persons and refugees after the Second World War made it a viable proposition for people to organize separate Serbian Orthodox parishes. However, because of political differences, the community divided into two groups: those loyal to patriarchate in Serbia and those who identified themselves with the Free Serbian Orthodox Church. The Free Serbian Orthodox Church Diocese of Australia and New Zealand formed in 1963 as a result of a breakaway from the mother church in Yugoslavia, which had become controlled and influenced by the then communist regime. The Free Serbian Diocese was already in existence in USA, Canada, and Europe. This diocese was not formed by a decree from Belgrade, rather it was a diocese that had sprung up through the will of the people and their support for their

religious heritage, culture and traditions. Since 1990 there have been significant steps towards reuniting the two churches (Spasović & Miletić, 2008).

4.2 Serbian Migration to Australia

Serbian migration to Australia began in the late nineteenth century when a small number of Eastern Orthodox Serbs migrated to the eastern States of Australia from Greece and the Middle East (Australian Department of Immigration and Multicultural Affairs, 2008). The great majority of Serbians in modern-day Australia came after the Second World War, assisted by the immigration policies of the Australian Government of the time.

According to the Dalmatian Genealogical and Historical Society in Auckland, New Zealand, the first Dalmatians migrated to New Zealand in the late-1850s, about one hundred and fifty years ago (Dalmatian Genealogical & Historical Society, 2009). As the ship berthed in Australia on its way to New Zealand, the Museum archives record that some of the Dalmatians on this journey remained in Australia. Their names were not recorded, only the fact that they did not continue to New Zealand. The Dalmatian voyagers were predominantly Serbs and Croats – members of both the Serbian Orthodox and Roman Catholic churches. Indeed, migration from Serbian lands to Australia led to the establishment of many new churches and to the revitalization of others, particularly Russian Orthodox and Roman Catholic. These churches not only fostered the immigrants' faith and forms of worship, but also encouraged the preservation of their languages and cultures.

With the onset of the Western European style, multi-party social democracy in Serbia in the 1990s came expectations that changes to both the social and economic systems would result in a better standard of living and improved working and social conditions. Fundamental to the transition from Yugoslav state socialism of Josip Broz Tito to Western European social democracy was the privatisation of the former Yugoslav industries. This privatisation and economic internationalisation resulted in massive price increases of manufactured goods and a rise of employment levels.

Indeed, prior to this time Yugoslavia was a substantial net exporter where import trade deficits were extremely rare and never long. Having spoken with many people from across all of the member states of former Yugoslavia, especially former Yugoslavs in Australia and

New Zealand, I can attest to a broad consensus of opinion that the situation in their former country was significantly better than things are now currently.

CHAPTER FIVE

ORGANOLOGY OF GUSLE

This chapter outlines important information related to the materials used in the manufacturing process of the gusle instrument. This includes the characteristics of the gusle performance practice and the cultural importance of the gusle practice including the relationship between the performer, the audience and gusle practice. Field work for this study involved visits to Serbia and Bosnia and was also carried out in Australia. This study involved the members of the Serbian-Australian Diaspora in Melbourne. Interviewing and data collection were the major activities during my field work. At the beginning of my field work I visited the places which are considered to be the main sources of material and spiritual importance to the gusle tradition.

When comparing the gusle to rebabs (Arabic الرباب or رباب – ‘bowed instrument’) – a generic term for the bowed, stringed instruments that are widespread throughout the Islamic world – there are some obvious similarities but there are quite a lot of differences between gusle and the rebabs.

Similar, of course, are the strings, the use of a bow and the broad similarities of construction and design (all have bodies/sound boxes and necks). Rebabs appear to have spread from Persia, (probably) India and the Trans-Jordan regions, from the seventh and eighth centuries. This has been via Islamic trading and missionary routes, encompassing much of North Africa, the Middle East, parts of Europe (especially Spain and the Ottoman-occupied regions of the Balkans and the Southeast), many areas of South Asia (Afghanistan, Muslim India, Iraq, Iran and Pakistan) and the Far East (Western Malaysia and Indonesia).

Depending on the culture, the rebab evolved from a single-stringed instrument to one of three or more strings. In modern contexts, the appearance, sound and purpose of rebabs vary from country to country. For example, in contemporary Afghanistan, the *kabuli rebab* is a plucked instrument, likewise the *seni rebab* of Northern India which most likely traces its origins to Greater Iran confirmed by its extensive use in the Indo-Sassanid court (3rd to 7th centuries).

The *rubab*, another plucked instrument, is found throughout much of Persia, especially in the music of the Afghan, Azeri, Tajik and Uzbek peoples. Similar to the *rubab*, is the Persian *kemenche* which is played with a bow. Rebabs (both bowed and plucked) were adopted as key instruments in Arab classical music. The North African traditions of Arabo-Andalusian music (especially *Gharnati*, *San'a* and *al-Maalûf*), kept alive primarily by descendants of Muslims who left Spain as refugees following the Reconquista, have featured three rebabs in particular: the *rebec* (reputedly the precursor of the violin), the *qitara* (*guitar*) and the *lute* (both allegedly adaptations of the plucked rebab). Rebabs (both plucked and bowed) became favourite instruments in the tea houses of the Ottoman Empire. Within different regions and contexts, the uses for the various rebabs have changed, for example from essentially folk instruments to classical orchestral instruments to formal court instruments and, in some instances, to instruments accompanying worship (amongst the *Sikhs* and some Indonesians, for example). In the eastern Malaysian states of Kelantan and Terengganu, the bowed rebab is endowed with healing powers in the psychotherapeutic ritual called Main Puteri. (*Main Puteri*, 2010).

Prior to the invasion of Europe by the Ottomans in the fourteenth century, the Persian/Asian rebab was not known by the general Balkan population. As with other nations of the world, modern Serbian society is a mix of various ethnicities. Included in this mix are Slavs, Vlachs (Romanian-Slavic), Cincars (now almost assimilated), Shops (Bulgarian-Slavic, assimilated), Arnauts (assimilated), Jews (Sephard and Khazars/Ashkenazies), Celts (assimilated), Romans (assimilated), Gypsies (Romani), and Turks (Muslims).

The Illyrian tribes of the Balkans, especially those who settled in the Dinaric region, have influenced all of these Serbian ethnicities since the times of their arrivals in the region. Given that the gusle tradition is known to have originated in and continues to be followed mostly in that region, the majority population of Illyrian-Serbian/Slavic origin, I propose that the gusle tradition is original to the Serbian peoples from Dinaric region of Balkan Peninsula. That is, it is not a borrowed or modified tradition but rather evolved in the region and subsequently spread through the Serbian peoples of all three major religions of the region – Serbian Orthodox, Roman Catholic and Islam. It is perhaps confusing but it could be possible to track the origins of gusle and according to that the researcher believes that there is reasonable evidence that the Serbian gusle originated and evolved in the Dinaric region.

By the time of the Ottoman Turk invasions of the Balkan Peninsula in the fourteenth century, the Gusle tradition was widely known as an element of Serb culture and heritage. Hence, the researcher is of the view that not only are the gusle instruments originally from the Dinaric region of the Balkan peninsula but also that their specific use was for the enrichment of performances of Serbian epic and lyric poetry and almost certainly, at some earlier point in history, other traditional forms of narrative expression in the Serbian language.

This view is formed primarily upon the existence and development of the gusle tradition within the Dinaric (particularly Illyrian) segments of the Serbian population rather than contributions made to the Serbian tradition via inheritance from broader Slavic heritage or culture. The construction, use and significance of the Serbian gusle have remained essentially unchanged for many centuries. This perspective is yet another potential confirmation that the origin of the gusle tradition is Illyrian/Serb. Further worthy of note is that the gusle is not used in any other capacity – that is, it is not performed in any other style or genre.

Most musical instruments are modified or evolve as a result of influences by the dominant culture, especially when introduced to the culture. The gusle instrument has remained an unchanged element of Serbian musical and oral (literary) tradition for many centuries. In addition, the gusle tradition influenced the cultures of the various peoples who came into contact with the Serbian tradition. Although the conversion of Illyrians/Serbs – and many others of the various ethnic groups of the Balkans – from their pagan religion(s) to Christianity often changed the content (text and topics) of traditional Serbian poetry, the nature of gusle performance as an independent art form remained fundamentally unchanged. If the gusle was an introduced instrument, it would almost certainly have transpired that the instrument and its performance/artistic purpose (maybe even its construction) would have been modified or evolved over time.

When adhering to the oldest traditions and knowledge regarding the construction of *gusle*, maple wood from the small Bosnian city of Glamoč was the most popular material used to make the instrument. Other celebrated instrument makers used wood from the same area for the construction of many different instruments, including Antonio Stradivari (Ćurković, 2006, pers. comm.). (Of note is that the ancestors of the author originate from this region of former Yugoslavia.) As a young boy I had a chance to enjoy the beauty of the Glamoč landscape. Part of my research will examine the extent to which the gusle-making tradition in

this area is still intact despite more than 15 years of recent political and social turmoil. Of particular interest is the *gusle* manufacturing processes of Serbia, Montenegro and Bosnia and Herzegovina

Most previous fieldwork about the *gusle* and *gusle* traditions have focused primarily upon the musical-historical and specifically musical aspects of the instrument itself – that is, the design, construction and materials of *gusle* and performance-related data regarding vocalisation/recitation when accompanied by the instrument in performance or evaluation and analysis of the *pesme* (epic and lyric poetry) on its own.

I have already discussed how the *gusle* is related directly and exclusively to Serbian and Balkan epic and lyric poetry traditions. It was important to note the *gusle* tradition among all performance styles throughout the region in order to establish an understanding of the diversity of *gusle* perceptions.

Gusle is the sound of Serbian epic and lyric poetry, combining the sung (or recited) and instrumental elements. The *gusle* tradition amalgamates two of the oldest Serbian art forms and is a fundamental constituent of heritage and culture in traditional Serbian society. Both the vocal (poetic) and instrumental components of *gusle* play significant roles in performance as they were present throughout Serbian history. Through the centuries *gusle* tradition has embodied Serbian cultural and social history. Indeed, the function of a *gusle* performance is to expound on historical, aesthetic, cultural, moral and spiritual values of Serbian people.

This project includes an evaluation of the characteristics and components of the *gusle* musical instrument in order to explore and evaluate the music and performance language of the *gusle* tradition. Socio-cultural and historical considerations are considered along with musical aspects, expressive elements and instrumental characteristics particularly those associated within contemporary Serbian-Australian contexts.

The multifaceted nature of *gusle* required a multifaceted approach to Serbian history, culture and traditions, both secular and religious. As most historical events and characters from Serbian and Balkan history are integrated within the *gusle* tradition, a clear awareness of their importance for the Serbian peoples throughout the centuries – whether in the homeland or from the Diasporas – is essential.

5.1 Traditional Serbian musical instruments

There are essentially four musical instruments that Serbian peoples view as being fundamental to their traditional music and musical heritage. I shall refer to each of them in terms of the Hornbostel-Sachs classification system first published in 1914. These are:

1) the six-row, chromatic button accordion (Serbian-style) (Hornbostel-Sachs number 412.132). The accordion was not a part of Serbian folk and ethnic music prior to the time of the creation of the 'Serbian-style' accordion, which is dated at about 1925. It rapidly became very popular in regions of Central Serbia from where it spread throughout the regions to become virtually an essential component of Serbian folk/traditional music by the 1950s (Hornbostel & Sachs, 1961).

2) the Gajda or Gajde (Hornbostel-Sachs number 422.22-62), a bagpipe with three types of chanters. One is a simple reed, open at one end; the second is a small, conical tube with eight finger holes; and the third is a long, no-holed drone pipe (Hornbostel & Sachs, 1961).

3) the Frula (Hornbostel-Sachs number 421.211.12), an end-blown, wooden flute with six finger holes (Hornbostel & Sachs, 1961).

4) most relevant to this study, the Gusle (Hornbostel-Sachs number 321.321-71), a stringed instrument (chordophone) with a commonly hemispheric body attached to a non-fretted neck fingerboard commonly featuring one string (sometimes two) bound to a tuning peg at the top of the neck and played with a bow. Similar instruments from the Balkan regions include the Gadulka of Bulgaria, the Byzantine Lyra of Crete and the Lahuta of Albania (Hornbostel & Sachs, 1961).

The researcher undertook two interviews with well-known Serbian gusle performer (guslar) Mr. Đorđije Koprivica. The first interview was conducted in Belgrade, Serbia and the second in Adelaide, South Australia during his most recent tour of Australia (December 2007 – January 2008). Koprivica's extensive knowledge regarding gusle tradition and performance practices as well as the gusle instrument itself was especially important for this research. In addition to the insights and information conveyed to the researcher by Koprivica.

5.2 The gusle instrument

The following discussion on the gusle is informed significantly from interviews with Serbian gusle performer Đorđije Koprivica. Data is also taken from an interview with Melbourne-based gusle performer Slobodan Čičarević, conducted in February 2008. Mr Čičarević came to Australia from Serbia as an established and well-known professional gusle performer. It is useful to note that both were born in small mountain villages in the region of Montenegro.

Serbian gusle are made preferably from a single piece of timber, commonly maple but also a walnut. If maple and walnut are unavailable, plum or cherry is utilised, although Serbs commonly say that “it is a sin to cut down fruit trees” to use their wood in this manner. By far the preferred timber for the creation of a gusle is that of the south-central European variant of the Norway (or European) maple (*Acer Plantanoides*), known as Džafer or Džefer in Serbian (Arabic: Jafar – meaning ‘stream’; English: Jaffer or Jeffer). The lignum must be taken from the uppermost section of the tree’s trunk as the wood is known to more elastic (less rigid and brittle) than that of the lower sections, allegedly because the upper section is closest to the sun. These trees are hard to find today, even in the area around the small Bosnian town of Glamoč, perhaps the most well-known traditional source of Džafer/Jafar maple trees.

Within the film project for this study is a segment of an interview with my father Milenko Stojisavljević. He was born in the village of Kovačevci, very near to Glamoč, Bosnia where he relates stories about his father (my grandfather) going into the forest between 1935 and 1941 looking for maple trees from which to construct a range of products – a carriage, for example. In other segments of the same film are parts of an interview with my cousin, Davor Ćurković born in Glamoč. In one of the segments Ćurković relates a legendary story about one the luthier sons of Antonio Stradivari who is reported to have come to the region to purchase maple for the backs of his violins.

According to Koprivica (2006) the minimum thickness of the maple plank from which a gusle is made is eight centimetres; that is, the depth of instrument including the walls. Each centimetre of timber requires at least one year of natural drying, although some modern instrument makers still use kilns to accelerate the process and reduce the drying time to as little as two weeks. Notably, the whole of the timber plank is dried prior to construction – a carving process – of the instrument.

Once the plank is dried, a skilled gusle maker using modern tools (power saws, lathes, electric planers) can bring a gusle to its basic configuration in about five or six days. If ornaments are included, more time is required for carving, hence the overall duration from start to completion would be subject to the elaborateness of the ornaments, primarily because most ornaments are still completely hand-carved.

Although made from a single piece of timber, the gusle has three sections (see illustration below Figure 2). The head is usually carved into the shape of an animal (dragon, wild goat, horse) or the face of a national hero. The neck is a continuation of the head and has no frets. The body (resonation chamber) is egg-shaped (almost hemispheric), smooth and approximately six centimetres deep. The body (without the neck) is approximately thirty-one centimetres long and between approximately twelve to fifteen centimetres wide. The length of the neck to the tuning peg (or first tuning peg in the case of two-stringed instruments) is essentially the same as the length of the outer dimensions of the body. Goatskin is stretched tightly across the body forming its top. Frequently five to ten small holes are made near the middle of the skin with a view to enhancing the tone while boosting the projection of the instrument. Sometimes these holes are used for fine tuning the timbre of the instrument, sometimes they are in patterns (often a cross) and sometimes there are no holes.



Fig.2 Serbian gusle (photo: Miroslav Stojisavljević, Melbourne 2007)

The tuning pegs are simple and push-based, as per instruments of the violin and viol families, and the strings rest on a moveable bridge. Bows are most commonly made of maple as well (although a range of other hardwoods can be found) and are often in the shape of a snake.

The traditional Serbian gusle has only one string although two-stringed instruments are sometimes made, particularly in some areas of the Dinaric region (western Herzegovina). Strings are made from at least 60 tail hairs of a horse. According to tradition, the best tail hair for the purpose comes from geldings. Bow string is also made of horse tail hair of approximately 40 strands. The neck is fretless and not touched when instrument is played.

5.3 Vocal performance style and the improvised nature of *gusle* performance

The performer of the *gusle* instrument is referred to as the *guslar*. A characteristic timbral skill involves the *guslar* adjusting the sound of his voice to the sound of *gusle*. The vocal style of *gusle* performer could be described as a melodic narration. The voice of a performer is purposely loud and declamatory with the intention to attract, sometimes even to alarm, the wide audience. The great majority of *gusle* performers are male. Koprivica stated

There are some female *gusle* performers, but still it is more of a male instrument. Many are unimpressed at seeing a female wearing a folkloric costume and playing the *gusle*. Maybe women should sing songs with a different theme than heroic songs. Lyric and love songs would be more appropriate for women *gusle* players. (Koprivica, 2006)

The conjunction of voice and instrument marks the moment when written words enter the world of the imagination. Every word has weight and every accentuation has meaning and purpose. After the epic works of Homer, *gusle* songs are arguably among a small group of the most important musical genres of Europe, as they are viewed as informing significantly the analysis and study of epic and lyric poetry, especially regarding the content and genesis of epic (and lyric) poetry and its relationship to song-based performance.

Guslari are solo performers who present epic and lyric poetry accompanied by a *gusle*. Commonly the works are sung, rather than simply recited with musical accompaniment, in a manner that might best be described as “speech-song” or pitched chant. Notably, the tune is improvised inasmuch as there is not (necessarily) an agreed version of the song’s melody, hence subsequent performances of a given work are virtually never exactly the same, even when presented by the same *guslari*. Hence, the works are songs only in the sense that they are (usually) vocalised (“sung”). They are not, however, “formalised” such that there is an imperative for melodic reproduction from one performance to another (nor is they meant to be). Indeed, it is not possible to recognise a work by either its “melody” (tune) or the notes/pitches and rhythms of its *gusle* accompaniment; every performance is meant to be extemporaneous, even subsequent performances of the same work by the same person. With the unity of the singing/narration and the playing of the *gusle*, the texture is merged into an essentially two-part ensemble. This is primarily as a result of the string of the instrument and the register of the vocal part having essentially the same “tonic” or fundamental. The

“speech-song” and the instrumental accompaniment are in the same register and tend to imitate each other or indeed are at times presented in virtual unison with unison segments sometimes used for effect or emphasis, commonly to highlight significant passages, contexts, and messages of the text. It is only in the interludes and the introductory and concluding passages of songs where the *gusle* improvises alone, with these passages generally used to “structure” or segment the work.

Important is the notion that *guslari* are not only singers who improvise, they are extemporaneous modifiers of existing works as well as creators of new ones. Indeed, a modern style exists where, for example, accounts of recent Serbian history and various other national issues are the topics of the *guslarske pesme*. This of course is because the very nature of *gusle* as a traditional art form is embedded in social and political issues.

Linguist Millman Parry (1902-1935) and his student Albert Lord (1912-1991), a professor of Slavic and Comparative Literature at Harvard University, supported the thesis that epic songs are more akin to linguistic improvisations than well-preserved originals. In Parry’s *Collection of Oral Songs* (1930) and Lord’s *The Singer of Tales* (1971) it is argued strongly that there is a complete divide between the non-literate authors of the epics and the scribes who wrote later them down. It is posited that the texts that have been preserved are transcriptions made by listeners of a single telling of the story. The story could have many versions. We have no records of the original composition. Within this exposition, I shall refer to this matter as it relates to the aural transmission of *gusle* repertoire.

5.4 Performance of the gusle

The *gusle* is not intended for solo performance rather *gusle* performance features the unification or integration of instrumental and vocal elements. In performance, *gusle* performers undertake what is considered by listeners to be a serious cultural, artistic and historical act: hence the attention level of the listener is expected to be quite high. That is to say, the nature and intention of the performance is formal and instructional, not an entertainment or divertissement over which listeners should chat, dance or distract. The most important aspect of *gusle* performance is not the standard or manner of the playing or singing (or narration, if spoken) but rather the stories, issues, concepts, teachings and so forth contained in the poetry. That is, for the audience the poem/lyric itself is the most significant part of *gusle* performance.

This is not to say that audiences do not observe, differentiate and appreciate standards of musical performance, rhythmic, timbral and structural relationships between the lyric and the playing of the instrument, and indeed the ‘musicality’ of performers, but a critical tradition regarding these primarily musical and comparatively artistic considerations is not a major issue. Of paramount importance are the message and the passion and sincerity of the delivery (both vocal/narrated/spoken and musical).

Commonly the *pesme* text will incorporate elements from the history of the local audience, such that performances of the same *pesme* by the same *guslar* will usually vary from region to region, sometimes from village to village, as the local history will be included as appropriate. Some researchers like Parry, Lord, Bartok and especially those who did not understand the language or the importance of the lyrics would not agree with this viewpoint, perhaps because their explorations of the genre rely almost exclusively on the written (published) text and do not take into account both the extemporaneous and regionally-focused nature of most gusle performances.

Gusle performance is always extemporaneous. By intention and tradition, every *guslar*’s performance of a *pesme* is different from that of any other *guslar* and, indeed, different from a previous performance of the same poem by the same performer. As so much of the delivery is extemporaneous and unique to the specific performance, the musical components of gusle are not (and probably should not be) notated formally. Although it is of course possible to notate a recording of a performance, such an undertaking is neither appropriate to the genre nor likely to be used at any future stage, even by the same performer.

The general nature of traditional Serbian gusle performance is fairly firm, virtually governed by the notion that musical virtuosity, elaborateness are neither the aim nor in fact a component of the presentation. Hence, a first experience of traditional gusle performance could lead one to the conclusion that the genre is simple and fairly primitive or perhaps that even the reputedly best practitioners are not very good. In fact, over the duration and development of the genre there have been a small number of truly extraordinary performers. The performance skills of these individuals, however, are rarely judged with consideration for the complexity of the playing of the gusle instrument nor with reference to the style, pitch accuracy, timbre of the singing, but with respect to issues of passion of delivery and

comprehension of the story and its messages on the part of listeners, coupled with an ability to remember the extreme length of most of the poems and an ability to modify as appropriate their content (including modification of text), messages, settings, and so forth.

The lyrics were not altered only because of a heightening of interest but also because it is difficult to memorise the whole of a poem in its original version. Further, for centuries there was no written tradition in any case. Undoubtedly, as per most oral traditions, gusle performers memorised the fundamental nature and message of the story and its main parts and characters and then created versions of the same work wherein some events could be changed in favour of one's more popular and relatable within the given setting. Therefore, proficiency in such modifications is an overarching criterion when gauging the standard of professional gusle performers as their success (and livelihood) depended significantly on how well accepted and understood their performances were among the common people.

Guslari pre-date the *trouweres* and *troubadours* of the middle ages in Europe. In many instances their functions were similar, although the Serbian gusle performers are perhaps even more to be viewed as peasant educators and carriers of news and (reasonably) current events. Worthy of note is that many *guslari* performed for the aristocratic classes as well and kept their employers aware of the current trends and views of common society and the peasantry, especially regarding matters of taxation, fairness of laws, social inequities and harsh landlords. Hence, an accomplished gusle performer needed a refined ability to make appropriate (and potentially offensive) social commentary and, almost certainly, a droll wit coupled with an outstanding memory, an ability to research local customs and attitudes whilst being able to sing (or recite or both) concisely whilst playing the gusle instrument in a manner that integrated both logical and artistically with the narrative.

5.5 Timbral and performance characteristics

The characteristic sound of the gusle purposely aligns with that of the human voice, especially the male voice. As mentioned previously, the instrument is an integral component of the story-telling. When combined with *pesme* a performance of gusle is created. Hence, gusle – the instrument – and gusle – the performance-based art form – utilise the same word for different purposes. Important to note, of course, is their absolute inseparability when gusle (the art form) is performed. One without the other lacks the strength and intensity that ensues when both are enjoined in performance.

During my research I observed that there are essentially three principal relationships between the singer/narrator and the instrument:

- 1) The instrument operates as an accompaniment to the voice/narration, sometimes complementing the texture and sometimes contrasted to it. As a result, every *guslar* adjusts the tuning of his instrument to suit his vocal range. There is no fixed or correct tuning for the instrument, as is the case with most European instruments.

- 2) The instrument is often played more actively (less in an accompanying capacity) between lines or phrases within stanzas or sections. Commonly in such instances the passion or emotional nature of the given line or phrase is highlighted by the 'response' from the *gusle* (instrument).

- 3) The instrument replaces the human voice at points where there is a break in the song or narration, especially at the ends of stanzas or sections. In such instances it is used to present interlude and it is not uncommon for a kind of musical dialogue to ensue between the voice and the instrument with the relationship being sometimes musically imitative (rhythm, pitch or both) and emotionally imitative.

It is generally accepted that the compass of the single-stringed *gusle* is a perfect fifth, this because the neck is about 30 to 32 centimetres long. Nevertheless, skilled *gusle* performers are able to generate an illusion the instrument's range is greater than it is, simply by the variations and ornaments of their voice. In addition, very few singers exceed the compass of a 5th except perhaps when changing octaves for purposes of effect or emphasis. Indeed, the vocal tessitura of most *guslari* is in the male tenor register with a very large percentage of the performances featuring melodies that rarely exceed the interval distance of a major third. This is because melodic complexity and vocal proficiency are much less important than the story itself. By virtually chanting the song (via the use of a small intervallic compass) diction is clear and the story is projected audibly and firmly. Similarly, the *gusle*'s compass is narrow and technical proficiency is not intended to be an element of the performance. In this art form virtuosity or comparatively high technical proficiency, whether vocal or instrumental, is counter-productive and would be a hindrance to the intention of the performance and indeed the genre itself.

Gusle singing tends not to follow an established melody, although generalised similarities of contour and articulation can be noted between two performances of the same *pesme* by the same *guslar*. It is important to note that artistic proficiency by a *guslar* is based much more on the degree to which he creates internally consistent and related melodies that are new to the specific performance than upon any notion of re-presenting the “melody” of the song. There is neither an established song melody nor gusle part. Neither the melody nor the instrumental contributions in virtually any formal sense are “handed down” as components of an oral aural tradition, nor is there an agreed understanding that a given performer is meant to re-produce (even approximately) the musical elements of his version of a particular *pesme*. Hence, gusle, although certainly stylised, is predominantly an improvised musical genre. Gusle performance intentionally lives in the moment.

As with most improvisatory styles, phrase repetitions are a common characteristic of gusle improvisation. The metric richness of the Serbian language forms another basis for repetition and imitation. The Serbian language incorporates seven grammatical cases (nominative, genitive, dative, accusative, vocative, instrumental and locative) which are often used to underpin improvisation of the narrative. Quite often a performer will avoid (or bend) the rules of syntax in order to add syllables, to adjust the scansion and affect the nature of the rhyme scheme. For example, replacing the genitive (second) grammatical case with the accusative (fourth) commonly changes not only the rhyme pattern but also the texture of the sentence while subtly altering the focus of its object and subject. To illustrate, instead of часни крст (chas-nee krst – honourable cross) a *guslar* could substitute часнога крста (chas-no-ga krst-a – (the) cross of honour). Similarly, it is not uncommon for the vocative (fifth) grammatical case to replace the nominative (first) case: the (archaic) phrase Вино пије Вишњићу Јоване (vee-no pee-yeh Vish-nee-chu Yo-vahn-eh – drinks (the) wine (does) Vishnechu Yovan) could replace Вишњић Јован пије вино (Vish-nech Yo-van pee-yeh vee-no –Vishnech Yovan drinks (the) wine). In both instances, the rhythm of the phrase is altered as are the ordering of the syllables, the articulation of the syllables and the sound of the last syllable (especially apropos matters related to rhyming). Another approach involves the doubling of the grammatical proposal, both to insert another syllable (or word) and to emphasise and enhance: на убаву на пољу Косову (na oo-ba-vu na pou-yu Ko-so-vu –on (the) beautiful (exalted), on the field of Kosovo ... rather than on the beautiful (exalted) field of Kosovo (Milošević-Dorđević, 1995, p. 44).

The specific rhythms of the *pesme* in performances by *guslari* are always adjustable, generally according to the rhythm of the song/poem, the typical style of the *guslar* (narrator/presenter), the mood of the presenter and, indeed, the nature of the event and its purpose. Some *guslari* tend to use longer breaks between the syllables, the verses or both; some join several into fewer syllables; most deliver a variety of these approaches in a range of combinations. The array of treatments is intended to reinforce the significance of the moment and the message or perhaps to highlight particular passages. Hence, the rhythm of *gusle* performance should not be characterised as strictly metric but rather as perhaps quasi-structured free-style, given that an over-arching rhythmic characteristic of a particular *gusle* performance is broadly related to, but not entirely constrained by, metric elements of the written poem/song.

In a sense, the rhythmic nature of a particular *gusle* performance has more to do with the manner in which the *guslar* might read the poem/song (including changes of emphasis, tempo, volume, timbre, etc.) rather than an imperative of adhering to the scansion or a rhythmic framework. That is to say, the decasyllable or octosyllable construct of the *pesme* frames the overarching rhythmic style of the performance, but there is no precise rhythmic regime imposed. Hence, there is no accepted 'right way' to perform a work and, therefore, no musically-notated versions where rhythmic imperatives are conserved. In addition, the nature or purpose of the performance and the topic of the *pesme* (comedy, celebration, remembrance, spiritual instruction, nationalism, etc.) as well as the type of the poem/song (especially whether lyric or epic) have considerable influence upon the style and manner of the performance, this ranging from treatment of rhythm through to timbral characteristics of the singing, the manner in which the *gusle* (instrument) is played, and so forth.

These elements vary from performance to performance by the same performer. Notably, however, young *gusle* performers develop their skills and proficiencies by exact imitation of a particular version performer by a master *guslar*. Over time a novice learns to demonstrate their own mastery via the quality and sophistication of their essentially improvised versions/interpretations which become truly their own.

Another important consideration relates to the development of Serbian epic poetry. Most of the surviving *pesme* feature references to turbulent epochs, especially periods of foreign

occupation of Serbian lands. The works have been created by poets/bards from across the spectra of society and possessed of a broad range of talents and understanding regarding the techniques required to write material of enduring quality.

From the peasant to the priest, the servant to the master, the tradesman to the warrior, various events, observations, wisdoms, etc. were depicted and presented in the poems/songs in ways that were not always correct historically but according to their own recollections and interpretations that ‘lived’ in their individual (not collective) memories. Beyond this, each retelling of the *pesme* by a *guslar* is very likely to include subtle variations of previous recollections/ interpretations by other performers. It is said, for example, that “gusle are capable of lies” (Nović, 2006). This adage refers to the common ‘adjustments’ of historical events not infrequently found in popular Serbian gusle. Further to this “adjustment” of an historical account is an approach whereby, for example, the enemy or enemy’s hero(es) are glorified (sometimes by adding new material to the poem) for the purpose of even greater exaltation of the domestic hero(es). Another common approach is to borrow and insert material from other epic sources, modifying the event and the characters to suit the requirements at the time. Instances of this method are found in Milton’s inspiration from Homer’s *Iliad* as found in *Paradise Lost* (*Iliad* – Book I: 53 [Pope translation]) and Njegoš’s inspiration from Milton’s *Paradise Lost* in *Luča Mikrokozma* (*Paradise Lost*, pp. 134, 135 & 144 and *Luča Mikrokozma*, pp. 231 & 236).

Tomo Maretić (1889, p. 83) perhaps the most famous (and often referred to as the first) Croatian linguist chronicled three principal characteristics of *pesme*:

- technique (that is, the manner of presentation – especially whether recited/narrated or sung);
- emphasis on history and historical accounts (especially with reference to eras and epochs);
- content of the songs (especially with respect to individuals, places and specific events).

This categorisation is consistent with the perspectives of other researchers who generally view it as the “structure of epic narration” (Škreb & Živković, 1992).

5.6 Social and cultural importance of gusle tradition

Gusle tradition as one of the oldest Serbian traditions embodies some of the earliest of Balkan cultural practices, especially the Dinaric region. Gusle songs differed from those of the *aoidoi* (the ancient Hellenistic bards or poets) and the nature and performance characteristics of, for example, the Homeric epics. Almost certainly, similarities or parallels are the result of the general aspects of all oral traditions rather than more specific or refined, formal analogues or stylistic affiliations. Circumstantial similarities can be found in some descriptive accounts or epithets, especially regarding the notion that blind singers were the primary carriers of the tradition, but this seeks to describe commonalities between the poets and performers rather than stylistic or artistic similarities at a more formal level.

Numerous scholars, such as Pavle Ivić and Nada Milošević-Đorđević, have researched the fields of epic and lyric poetry (as a language art) but relatively few have researched the musical aspects and contributions of the performance of works of epic and lyric and poetry. In my view, such an evaluation should result in different and enriched perspectives and conclusions apropos the true nature of the genres.

Although Parry and Lord studied the manner of creation and transmission of gusle text (the epic poetry) they essentially did not consider the musical aspects of the gusle tradition which are, as argued, virtually commensurate components of gusle performance. If they had combined their research findings regarding the linguistic aspects of the text of the poems/songs with the musical contributions to gusle performance traditions, almost certainly the nature (perhaps the focus) of their observations and conclusions would be different than they are. The nature and style of the singing when accompanied by gusle is commonly viewed as intriguing. This essentially neutral (or intentionally non-offending) term is almost certainly based upon the listener's perception of what does (and does not) constitute 'quality' (or virtuosic) singing and instrumental performance.

Listeners unfamiliar with the gusle tradition would perhaps notice that someone is dressed unusually, is playing an unfamiliar musical instrument and is singing loudly (and commonly in a manner which would be deemed as pitched shouting rather than singing per se), hence they are performers of music – being both singers and instrumentalists. From a visual perspective, a performer dressed in ornate national costume playing an instrument that

features interesting carvings and art work certainly attracts attention. But perhaps after only a short while, and especially if the Serbian language is not known by listeners, an uninitiated audience would almost certainly become increasingly impatient as their expectations of a musical performance based upon, at least, melodic and rhythmic underpinnings are not fulfilled.

Such listeners are commonly not aware that technically – and aesthetically-based singing (as a performance art) is neither the basis of the use of pitched speech nor is it the artistic intention of the performer. That is to say, guslari are not singers in a ‘standard’ sense. Their “singing” can be classified as pitched chanting. The melodic content of most (perhaps all) guslari are constructed to evoke and accompany the pain and suffering, the drama and pathos, the meanings and acumen of the narrative. Contrasts of the volume are commonly used for emphasis and impact.

Given the overriding significance of the text, the average volume level is comparatively high as everyone must hear every word of the text to know and apprehend not only the topics and messages of the *pesme* but also to appreciate the nuances brought to the specific performance by the guslar. Performers of *gusle* aim to inform and reinforce to the audience the key elements of the topics, subjects and events found in the poem/song. Therefore, the quality of the guslar’s performance is almost entirely dependent upon the degree to which he (or she) is able to communicate the issues, messages, emotional content, passion from the poem/song and, the degree to which they create the appropriate atmosphere or mood (especially from passage to passage) while maintaining the interest level of the audience.

An audience measures a performance primarily with respect to whether or not the mood, emphases, messages, nuances, and so forth found in the text itself are conveyed to them appropriately and convincingly. Basically, *gusle* performance is neither about instrumental prowess on the *gusle* nor about the standard, quality or texture of singing. It is about the poetry (the text) – its impact, message, mood, nuances. The musical components of the performance are of secondary importance to the *pesme*. Without the poem, the music is purposeless, indeed irrelevant.

Despite the convention of maintaining complete silence during the presentational sections of a performance, it is not uncommon for some members of an audience to use the breaks

between sections of a poem/song to acknowledge respect for or aversion towards characters or events from the work. Often the basis of these interjections has as much to do with the particular interpretation by the guslar as they have to do with the text itself. That is to say, audience members sometimes take exception to the amount of importance that a guslar might place upon, for example, a villain or an enemy. Further, these outbursts are often related to a different point of view regarding the historical event or some other elements from the text. This relates to the fact that many guslari modify the original text (sometimes the essence of the story itself) to make the performance more timely, its setting and contexts more immediate, and its message more relevant to the contemporary audience.

5.7 The gusle performer and the audience

During the time of the Ottoman occupation of Serbian lands, people from other Asian and Eurasian areas of the empire migrated to Europe together with the Turks. Amongst this group of émigrés were a large number of Gypsies (Roma). Often they found employment doing the jobs that others were not willing to do – but during the night they were musicians.

Turks and Gypsies introduced the notion of tips as a reward for musicians (Nedić, 1990, p. 42). Over time, tips for music (particularly money for the performance of a requested song) became the norm amongst virtually all peoples of the Central Balkans. Indeed, the practice remains widespread in Romania, Serbia, Bosnia, Greece, Macedonia, and Montenegro. It is important to note, however, that tipping in this manner relates to musical performances, especially, although not exclusively, to the performance of popular folk music. Importantly, gusle performance by Christian Serbs is not viewed as a music-based form of entertainment. Significant episodes of Serbian history are placed in the epic works. These songs carry the tragedy of the Serbian people during the Ottoman occupation and according to that any form of entertainment is excluded. Gusle performance is rather seen as an act of respect than a simple performance aimed to amuse or entertain. Aleksić (2006) commented

I must be honest when I talk in regards of basics. Every person likes to be gifted. The difference between Muslim and Christian guslars is in the way of gifting. The Muslim likes to stop the gusle performance to gift the performer. They do not mind if they stop the performance just to gift the guslar. Of course, they do not stop the performance during the singing, just during the instrumental breaks. Christian Serbs do not gift guslar during the performance. It would be a great shame for the performer to get

stopped by the audience. That would mean that something is wrong with his performance or with the song. Serbs rather wait until the end of the performance to gift the guslar.

In contrast Čičarević (2008) stated:

Once in my life I was stopped during the performance. That person was lucky to leave that place alive. He offended me and the audience but what was more important, he offended the tradition and the spirits of the dead who died for freedom. Everyone in the room got angry when they saw what was happening. That was only once in my life. We know that Muslims give *bakšiš* (tips) during the performance because the gusle are just another musical instrument to them. Gusle are not their tradition. Gusle belongs to Serbs. For us, gusle are sacred. (Čičarević, 2008)

To this, Plemić (2006) provides another insight:

Gusle are popular amongst Muslims and Croatians, also Albanians. Muslims and Albanians give money to guslars during the performance. In Serbian view that is a great shame for the performer. We pay a lot of care and attention to understand the messages from the songs. The epic songs are not just a form of entertainment. The songs are the stories of Serbian survival. Muslims can give the tips and to celebrate their heroes because they probably feel victorious by bringing the misery and death to others. Contrary, we have nothing to celebrate, we must learn and remember. The gifts after the performance are not tips. Those gifts are the act of support and appreciation of the guslars effort to learn all those songs. Guslar should not be an entertainer. The Guslar is a messenger, a story teller. (Plemić, 2006).

Muslims and Islamic converts throughout the region continue to reward Muslim *guslari* with money almost always bestowed during the performance, that is, while the performer is on stage. Hence, Muslims of the region view *guslari* as professional entertainers, even if not as performers of folk music or as musicians per se. Contrastingly, Christian Serb *guslari* neither expect nor accept tips for their work. These performers would be offended, even insulted, believing that the one offering the tip is, at best, culturally ignorant and unaware of the roles of *guslari* and how they view themselves. Christian Serb *guslari* regard themselves and their

roles in a way that could be considered similar to that of priests, elders of the church and public servants.

They envisage themselves as educators, historians and preservers of tradition and culture –not as popular entertainers. Christian Serbs of the general population follow their traditions with a deep respect for those who have fought against oppression and who have died trying to liberate the people and the lands. As an extension of this perspective, Christian Serb guslari consider the accounts of such suffering and hardship are not a popular diversion and are not entertainment. Through the ages, gusle performance has had an educative role which remains essentially unchanged to the present day, this despite a range of societal changes and adjustments to cultural mores and foundations.

Through their playing and singing, professional gusle performers have managed to live through the tough and the prosperous times, but Christian Serb guslari are traditionally rewarded with gifts (not money) presented discretely after the performance, not while the performer is on stage (Nedić, 1990, p. 43). This approach is considered to be the only “decent” or appropriate way to reward these performers – a view upheld staunchly by the performers themselves. Notably, modern technology has made it easier for Christian Serb professional guslari to make a reasonable living because they can now sell recordings before and after their performances.

Beyond its sound characteristics, the gusle musical instrument has functions that are symbolic and traditional within the historical and cultural milieu of Serbs. Gusle performance traditions and the instrument’s inextricable link with Serbian epic poetry are sources of spiritual inspiration to the people inasmuch as, when combined in performance, these entities (gusle and pesme) are unquestionably salient elements of Serbian nationalism, loyalty and faith – both religious and precept-based. The continuous repetition and glorification of historical events from Serbian history is not intended to blur or in any way diminish either the achievements or the unfortunate outcomes of contemporary events but rather to acknowledge that Serbs do not forget (although most forgive) what has happened to them. Such acts of remembrance (that is, gusle performances) serve to galvanise the nation. They are manifestations of unconcealed patriotism intended to awaken, motivate and activate the various constituencies of Serb society – and not infrequently across the social and economic spectra.

Seemingly not well understood outside of the region, most Serbs – both at home and throughout the world – carry strong enmity regarding the five wars that involved Serbia during the twentieth century. A cursory look at the realities of the treatment of Serbia during and the major conflicts of World War 1 and World War 2 would perhaps provide foundations for understanding the anger, cynicism, and variances of patriotism (both positive and negative) that are to be found amongst contemporary Serbs (as with most similarly-treated peoples and ethnicities throughout the world).

Socio-economic situations and generally unstable political environments have resulted in various unfortunate circumstances, an array of un-realistic expectations, and prevailing viewpoints throughout the broader international community which neither reflect nor realise the complexities of the situations and their origins. As an example, the period of state socialism that followed World War 2 was one of great social stability. The decade of turmoil after the death of Marshall Tito in 1980 saw the systematic undermining of the Yugoslav Federation by a few of its member states. It was during this time that the “central class” – which constituted the largest portion of population in former Yugoslavia – diminished considerably. Indeed, it is generally agreed that presently more than two-thirds of the populations of former Yugoslavia (comprised of Croatia, Slovenia, Serbia, Montenegro, Bosnia-Herzegovina and the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia) is of the “poor class”, at least when compared to the previous standards of living and earning power of the same groups and families/clans. (The use of the term “poor class” rather than “working class” is intentional given that unemployment in much of the region has been between fifteen and twenty percent in some areas and up to ninety percent in some areas for the better part of thirty years.) I have experienced both systems and feel that socio-economic conditions are noticeably worse now (and since about 1985) than they were during the time of the socialists. One of the most significant precipitators of this change relates to the exodus of the younger and more highly educated sectors of the population during the mid-1980s and early 1990s. As a result, the average age of the population increased fairly significantly while at the same time the percentage of skilled workers – those contributing perhaps most substantially to consolidated/state revenues from which are funded infrastructure, social welfare and pension programs, health and education, for example – fell considerably. As a result, the overall standard of living throughout the region was negatively affected, and in many areas fairly dramatically so.

According to renowned Serbian guslar, Dordije Koprivica (2008, pers. com) prior to World War 2 almost every village in the Dinaric region of Serbia had a gusle luthier. In contemporary Serbia (which from 1999 includes only a small portion of the Dinaric region) there are approximately ten professional gusle makers only. Koprivica commented that there are perhaps a few more than 10 in Bosnia and Montenegro combined. In previous eras, gusle were found in almost every Serbian home even though almost invariably no-one in the household played the instrument nor performed as a guslar. The instrument was viewed as a national icon – a symbol of Serbian “belonging” – not as an ornament.

According to Slavko Aleksić (Aleksić, 2006) the gusle were almost without exception placed in a prominent corner of the main (lounge) room or occasionally at some other very well-observed place in the home. Their primary purpose in such settings was to indicate to visitors that they were entering a home where Serbian culture and traditions are cherished and observed. These gusle were to be maintained so that they were ready for performance. The intention was that a visiting guslar should have an instrument of quality upon which to perform. Indeed, if the household instrument was not maintained at performance standards, it would be concluded that either the head of the family had died or that the household was not truly interested in Serbian traditions and culture. An instrument not ready for performance was viewed as indicating that the head of the house considered it to be a simple ornament as its importance had been diminished due to a lack of respect for traditions and culture on the part of the owner. In this context, un-maintained gusle could be the source of considerable shame for a family. Even greater shame ensues if an un-maintained (or un-serviced) gusle is a present from someone dear, is part of an inheritance or is perhaps given by someone worthy of considerable respect as the lack of care of the instrument by the giver is often seen indicating a level of indifference for Serbian culture and traditions. This researcher concludes that there is a notion that the recipient is being given an almost “living” thing which must be in working order when received and kept in working order in perpetuity because it possesses almost mystical properties – it embodies the “story of the people”.

Koprivica commented that the gusle in households are usually placed very near to the religious icons of the home. Serbian icons of Christian saints are invariably afforded the most important places in Serbian homes. Specific saints are family protectors and each family celebrates the festival day(s) of their saint on a particular day(s) in the year. Following Easter

and Christmas the specific saint's days is the most important religious celebration during the year for the Serbian family. Locating a gusle next to the icon of the patron saint of the household/family is not only a sign of respect for the instrument and the history and traditions that it embodies, but also confirms that Serbs have not forgotten their pagan, pre-Christian roots and traditions, despite the historical, cultural and religious transformations that have occurred since those times.

Koprivica stated that the gusle tradition not only precedes the bringing of Christianity to the Serbs (the *Rashans*) but also pre-dates Christianity itself. He commented that his own research has confirmed that the instrument of the *Rashans* (that is, the *gusle*) is mentioned numerous times within the text of the Hebrew Bible (the "Old Testament"). Gusle tradition is just one of many to have survived from the past. Koprivica also commented that in the past most priests of the Serbian Orthodox Church were followers of gusle tradition, particularly given its significance as the basis of popular and informal historical and cultural education amongst the broader Serbian population (especially the peasantry).

Gusle performance was a smooth or perhaps somehow more 'benign' vehicle for presenting the almost apocryphal messages (whether patriotic, religious, historical and cultural) of the epic poetry (*pesme*) in an artistic manner which was acceptable to the religious dogma of the Church and its leadership. *Guslari* priests could adjust and re-write parts of the poems/songs which were perhaps not in the original form in accordance with the general views of the Church. An example of this is the role of Vuk Branković, the ruler of Kosovo and Metohija (northern Macedonia and northern Montenegro) in the time before and after the first battle of Kosovo in 1389. Vuk Branković and his father-in-law – Lazar Hrebeljanović, the ruler of Raška – were the most influential and powerful rulers of Serbian lands at the time. According to the epic poems (*pesme*) related to the times as they have been presented for perhaps the last 500 or 600 years (especially the *Battle of Kosovo* poem itself, most of which was written down long after the battle – some of it even a few centuries afterwards) Vuk Branković betrayed the Serb armies at Kosovo by withdrawing his support and, as a result, the Serbs lost the battle.

Accounts by Turkish historians (especially), however, indicate clearly that the Turks did not win the Battle of Kosovo because of the withdrawal of Branković's army. Nevertheless, the surviving *pesme* regarding the battle has marked Branković as a traitor who caused the loss

and who was ultimately responsible for the fall of the Kingdom of Raška. Modern historians generally refute this view, mainly because it is well-documented and verified independently (by contemporary Turkish historians, Mehmet Nesiri for example, that Vuk Branković continued to war against the Ottoman Turks until his death 1398. In the introduction to *Battle of Kosovo: Serbian Epic Poems* (translated by Matthias & Vučković, 1987) John Matthias states that “the epic songs give two contradictory reasons for the Serbian defeat (at the Battle of Kosovo): the treachery of Vuk Branković – which seems to have no basis in fact – and Lazar’s (Hrebeljanović) decision before the battle to sacrifice his earthly kingdom for a heavenly kingdom, to lead his men into battle knowing what the tragic outcome was to be as one might lead a host of martyrs consciously into a conflagration”. The specific excerpt from the poem/song follows:

The Downfall of the Kingdom of Serbia

(section from the *Battle of Kosovo*)

Yes, and from Jerusalem, O from that holy place,

A great gray bird, a taloned falcon flew!

And in his beak he held a gentle swallow.

But wait! it's not a falcon, this gray bird,

It is a saint, Holy Saint Elijah:

And he bears with him no gentle swallow

But a letter from the Blessed Mother.

He brings it to the Tsar at Kosovo

And places it upon his trembling knees.

And thus the letter itself speaks to the Tsar:

'Lazar! Lazar! Tsar of noble family,

Which kingdom is it that you long for most?

Will you choose a heavenly crown today?

Or will you choose an earthly crown?

If you choose the earth then saddle horses,

Tighten girths – have your knights put on

Their swords and make a dawn attack against

The Turks: your enemy will be destroyed.

But if you choose the skies then build a church –

O, not of stone but out of silk and velvet –

*Gather up your forces take the bread and wine,
 For all shall perish, perish utterly,
 And you, O Tsar, shall perish with them."*
*And when the Tsar has heard those holy words
 He meditates, thinks every kind of thought:
 "O, Dearest God, what shall I do, and how?
 Shall I choose the earth? Shall I choose
 The skies? And if I choose the kingdom,
 If I choose an earthly kingdom now,
 Earthly kingdoms are such passing things –
 A heavenly kingdom, raging in the dark, endures eternally."*
*And Lazarus chose heaven, not the earth,
 And tailored there a church at Kosovo –
 O not of stone but out of silk and velvet –
 And he summoned there the Patriarch of Serbia,
 Summoned there the lordly twelve high bishops:
 And he gathered up his forces, had them
 Take with him the saving bread and wine.
 As soon as Lazarus has given out
 His orders, then across the level plain
 Of Kosovo pour all the Turks.*

Translated by George Rapall Noyes (Bacon, 1913)

Because Vuk Branković managed to survive the battle by withdrawing to preserve his army (as did the Bosnian Serbs under the leadership of the General Vladko Vuković), over time the orally-transmitted *pesme* have branded Branković as a traitor who betrayed Tsar Lazar Hrebeljanović in order to become the supreme ruler of Serbia. As mentioned above, this perspective is generally rejected by modern Serbian historians – although it remains apparent in the epic traditions of *pesme*. More likely is that either Tsar Lazar did indeed plan to be a martyr or (probably) the tale itself was modified over time – especially by *guslari* priests – so that the power and purity of religious faith could be both reinforced and enshrined. Unfortunately, the modifications to the stories made Branković into the “bad guy” – a traitor. (Notably, the tales of Vuk Branković, especially as related to the near decade following the

Battle of Kosovo, comprise the material for a popular Serbian folk tradition in its own right, likewise represented in folk epic poems and narrative legends.)

Given that these types of modifications seem not to be unique to Serbian epic poetry but indeed common to many accounts from within the oral traditions found in cultures throughout the world, it is prudent that the literary and poetic/artistic values and characteristics of epic poetry be detached from notions of historical verity and probity. In that sense, although the beauty and the artistic significance of gusle tradition and Serbian epic poetry are not in dispute, their content (especially as works of history) contain elements of both positive and negative patriotism, historically questionable perspectives, vested interests, and (almost certainly) contrived inaccuracies which serve to (when necessary to) promote patriotic, religious and sectarian feelings within the people. Hence, it is here maintained that genuine adherents and practitioners of the gusle tradition are those who view it as interesting and broadly informative regarding Serbian culture – not only to Serbs but also to a wider audience, especially those who have had little or no previous contact with the genre – but who do not use it as a basis for mounting historical, sectarian and religious debates or disputes.

In modern renditions of classical *pesme* the vocabulary remains fundamentally unchanged; the characters and the events are updated and presented to the audience. In most of the original versions of the epic songs, episodes from history are featured but historical facts are often modified to varying degrees and, in addition, rarely impartial personal and group observations and perspectives are either stated directly or insinuated strongly.

Before embarking on this study my perceptions and understandings about the gusle tradition were coloured by a dominant view that held gusle to be essentially inviolable and sacred. My current understandings have been reached through analytical processes of historical perspectives and traditions. I shall discuss these further in my findings.

CHAPTER SIX

FINDINGS OF THE RESEARCH

Between October of 2005 and March 2010 a total of twenty-two interviews were completed. These interviews were carried out with i) people living in Serbia and Bosnia, ii) with people who came to Melbourne, Australia and Auckland, New Zealand during the Serbian Diasporas since World War 2 (from 1949), and iii) with two individuals born in Australia but whose parents emigrated from Serbia in the 1950s. Two of them were interviewed twice because their involvement with the tradition was crucial for my research process.

According to the findings, the researcher claims that younger generations have less knowledge of, and interest in learning about the gusle tradition than do older generations of Serbs. It was important to establish whether or not this claim can indeed be substantiated. Immediately apparent is that circumstances where young people live, learn and grow in an environment wherein Serbian is not dominant have difficulty learning even the basics of the language. Although many of them acquire a rudimentary understanding and level of proficiency in conversational Serbian, the more sophisticated, stylised and elegant components and nuances found in *pesme* are almost entirely beyond their linguistic abilities and understanding. They are, therefore they are not able to understand beyond the surface meanings of the poem/song and rarely the hidden meanings of the work.

As mentioned in the Chapter two, the interviews were conducted with people from a cross-section of age groups, separated into twenty-year bands. At the times of their interviews, the youngest participant was 18 years old while the eldest was 84. All but the youngest and the oldest of the interview participants were between the ages of 23 and 73 years and the two-decade banding resulted in fairly well balanced brackets of six, five and seven interviewees, that is: 21-40 years ~ 6 participants; 41-60 years ~ 5 participants; 61-80 years ~ 7 participants. Apart from the scholars/academics/authors (two individuals) and the *guslari* (gusle practitioners), no attempt was made to establish a range of levels of expertise and familiarity with the gusle tradition and *pesme*.

Beyond this language-based consideration, a fairly comprehensive understanding of gusle traditions requires a reasonably in-depth understanding of Serbian (or Croatian or South-Slavic Muslim) history (both temporal and religious) and culture. On their own, each of these

factors is significantly negative; in combination they virtually ensure an inability to preserve the gusle cultural tradition, at least as it understood and practiced within its indigenous contexts.

With respect to young people and the issue of cultural preservation (especially regarding gusle tradition) it is noted that the contemporary Anglo-Australian cultural attitudes, values and perspectives are by far the most prevalent and dominant. The younger interviewees (especially) indicated a view that the vast majority of their understanding and awareness of Serbian culture was based in Serbian (Croatian, etc.) contemporary popular music, which itself is heavily influenced by American/Anglo-Australian/Western European trends, melodies, harmonies, styles, instrumentation, and a range of other musical elements.

In addition, it is important to understand that contemporary Serbian folk music (as opposed to popular music) has, over time, become strongly influenced by the characteristics of, Greco-Turkish and Middle Eastern musical styles, textures and elements. The notion of the preservation of Serbian culture via an awareness of *pesme* and gusle tradition was almost completely outside of the purview of these young people. Even those who were aware of them at a simplistic or very rudimentary level tend to consider that they are “something for old people” or “for peasants” (Aleksić, 26/10/2006) and neither of any interest to them nor of any significance to their lives.

Despite the Australian Special Broadcasting Service (SBS) television and radio network, much more than news and current events is simply not available to many immigrants, regardless of their origins – and perhaps most particularly central Europeans and some central Asian ethnicities. This is almost certainly because there are so many language groups within Australian there is neither sufficient time nor enough money to fund much more than news and current events from across a representative spectrum of Diaspora communities.

There are four dialects and two other languages now spoken in the former Yugoslavia: Bosnian, Croatian, Montenegrin and Serbian with (Slavic) Macedonian and Slovenian being the separate languages. Prior to the partitioning of the former Yugoslavia in the early 1990s, the four current dialects were perceived as part of one language – Serbo-Croatian – with two written forms, one using Latin characters and the other using Cyrillic characters.

With respect to broadcasting related to people from former Yugoslav backgrounds, SBS programming of news and current events and occasional other types of broadcasts need to be delivered in all six of the languages (not three as would have been the case prior to the early 1990s) such that even greater time and funding constraints are placed on the network apropos the immigrant populations from former Yugoslavia.

Almost certainly Australia is one of the few developed countries without cable television networks that include the ability for users to purchase the programming of channels/networks from around the world. Contemporary Australian broadcast media (excluding the SBS) source a large percentage of their news and general information and a significant proportion of their entertainment programming – including films, sit-coms, drama, children's programmes, serials, syndicated programmes, and so forth – from the United States of America and the United Kingdom.

The community members who are passing on cultural resources are among a small group of people inside the community. These people are usually self-organised to undertake individual research and actions. I asked all twelve of the Australian resident interviewees for their point of view regarding internet affordability and access to information and programming regarding Serbian culture in general and gusle tradition in particular.

Their views were notably similar. Firstly, there was a general consensus of opinion that, with respect to the broadcast media, the Australian government choose to foster linguistic and cultural homogeneity, especially with respect to assimilation into Australian culture and the development and enhancement of competencies in English. Although this position could be considered unfair, the consensus of opinion of the interviewees was that, in the final analysis, the approach compels immigrants to accept the actuality and learn at least the basics of the official language of the country. The approach is seen as helping to develop the notions of an Australian social identity and the growth of a unique and genuine national character.

Secondly, the interviewees were in general agreement that the continent of Australia is so far from much of the rest of the world, especially from Europe, that the greater majority of émigrés to Australia are unlikely to return to live in their country of origin, especially those from central Europe. Indeed, the viewpoint was consistent that the greatest percentage of émigrés (especially those from former Yugoslavia) will not be able to afford to visit or return

to their homelands more than a few times in their lives. Accordingly, the Australian government supports and promotes a position whereby immigrant populations and their children (especially those born in Australia) are steadily compelled to assimilate into Australian society and culture. Cultural assimilation is a socio-political response to demographic multi-ethnicity that supports or promotes the assimilation of ethnic minorities into the dominant culture. It is opposed to an affirmative philosophy (for example, multiculturalism) which recognizes and works to maintain differences. To substantiate this claim I must consider that Australian government is constantly highlighting that the Australian society was seen by others as one of the most tolerant multi-ethnicity in the world. Contrary, the Serbian government, for example, was frequently accused as non-tolerant towards ethnic minorities. What are the differences between the Australian and Serbian treatment of national minorities?

Several interviewees went on to contribute perspectives regarding the polarisation within immigrant populations in Australia, especially with respect to the viewpoints of the younger versus the older generations of, in this case, Serbian-Australians. While the elders of the Serbian-Australian population (those not born in Australia) see and call Anglo-Australians “the English ones” whereas Australian-born Serbs and younger immigrants tend to have a different, especially less-ethnocentric perspective.

The interviewees commented that the Serbian-Australian elders continue to be influenced by the social, cultural and political divisions from ‘old’ Europe while younger people – whether native-born or immigrant – have been educated in and acculturated to Australian ways and perspectives.

The elders feel that Anglo-Australian culture is essentially English (and increasingly American) and are disturbed by the belief that their children are being (or have become) assimilated into an essentially European culture that is different from their own. An extension of this position is that many older Serbs dislike (or at best distrust) the English (and increasingly the Americans), primarily because of a series of bombings by the British towards the end of the Second World War and various occurrences (especially bombings and perceived betrayals involving both the British and the Americans) during the Yugoslav civil war and the war in Kosovo in the 1990s.

Several of the interviewees (particularly the older ones, Slobodan Čičarević, Milan Vojnović, Miroljub Stanković and Luka Rakočević) discussed the media blockade and questionable accuracy and balance issues with undisguised bitterness, although the majority of them appear to view these issues as being consistent with the realities of immigrant and refugee populations from similar circumstances throughout the world (for example, Armenians, Chileans, Eritreans, Georgians, Iraqis, Somalians, Sri Lankans, and so forth).

A total of twenty-two interviews were conducted for this study. It was important for me to differentiate avowed nationalists, positive patriots and contributors to the preservation of the cultural and national tradition (especially practitioners and individuals with informed and academic perspectives, whether advocate or sceptic). Also significant to the research is an attempt to illuminate the extent to which the tradition is related to Serbian nationalism in the distant past, the recent past (the twentieth century) and more recent times (since the late-1990s). It is important to notice that interviewee data, collected during the research process support this statements.

For the sessions with the more gusle knowledgeable of the interview participants – the three *guslari*, the informed sceptic professor of literature and the priest – most of the questions from the second interview (those for Aleksić & Koprivica) were included together with the general questions for all participants.

During some of the interviews a major difficulty for the researcher was to avoid the elaborations to the responses that sought to open pathways to ultra-nationalist perspectives and proclamations or invectives of, what might be termed, ‘negative patriotism’. Some interviewees were generally enthusiastic about the gusle tradition as a cultural entity and significant element of Serbian national heritage. Although sometimes almost aggressively patriotic themselves, these generally enthusiastic interviewees viewed all forms and epochs of the gusle genre as being artistically, creatively, historically, ethnically and culturally significant.

Other participants from within the more expert group were unable to view the historical (or ‘original’) gusle and *pesme* traditions as being aesthetically, culturally or artistically significant, preferring to locate their performance practice and attachment to the genre exclusively from within contemporary milieus, especially with specific reference to the

conflicts of the 1990s in former Yugoslavia and socio-political events in Serbia (and other regions populated by Serbs) since that time.

One of the fundamental outcomes of the research demonstrates that a single shared perception of the nature and characteristics of gusle tradition almost certainly does not exist. Each of the interviewees held a range of knowledge and understanding, perceptions and perspectives regarding the tradition and, especially, how it relates to their own 'Serbian-ness'.

The levels of qualitative and quantitative perceptions and perspectives vary between individuals, sometimes with minimal differences. Even a slight variation of the given question (the use of a potentially value-laden word or phrase for example, patriotism/nationalism, war criminal/patriot etc.) had the potential to trigger a tangential response or even result in an aggressively divergent view of the matter under consideration.

Familiarity with the gusle tradition, with Serbian *pesme* in particular and with epic poetry in general, together with an understanding of the mentality of the Serbian people (being Serbian by birth) helped me to navigate deep and potential dangerous 'waters' without losing my way.

I have observed nationalist mentality and heard its rhetoric for much of my life. In addition, as a student of cultural history I have heard or witnessed similar things from people of other backgrounds, whether closely related to Serbian culture and language or completely outside Serbian traditions. In my view, all manifestations of nationalism are essentially the same, simply with different names. Common characteristics include a narrow perspective of the world, of history, of ethnicity, and of religion.

6.1 Perception and awareness of Serbian gusle tradition: performers, devotees and audiences

Guslari (performers) and the relatively small group of aficionados of the gusle tradition and Serbian cultural heritage are clearly distinct from the general audience. Most of the audience members might describe themselves as participants in a kind of ritual that has some remote relationship to the notion of what it is to be a Serb or perhaps as observers of an anachronistic, cultural 'curiosity'. This observation highlights categories when one compares gusle traditions to those of other cultures: distinctions which exist both inside and outside Serbian lands. In the past (even during the lifetime of the researcher in some regions of

former Yugoslavia) the gusle tradition was a significant and almost defining component of the cultural accoutrements of all Serbs.

With the historical, educative, cultural and spiritual roles played by the gusle tradition evoked via performance, many of the salient aspects and the most important elements of a unified Serbian national identity were generated and preserved. In more modern times, however, even gusle devotees have divided into essentially three groups: i) those who feel that, in order to remain culturally 'alive', the gusle tradition should incorporate contemporary subjects, contexts and movements; ii) those who believe that the tradition is primarily cultural and artistic (with some historical elements) hence it should be viewed and experienced primarily from a more scholastic or intellectual perspective; and iii) those who argue that the realities of the modern world require a relaxation from the old traditionalism – essentially, that ethnic traditions such as gusle belong to museums and academics.

However, it was commonly the case that the performers were forbidden and forced to return to home to the countryside or the mountains, and the tradition was not brought forward into public and international spheres until the next time when it was viewed as political and socially useful. Hence, the cultural and traditional contributions previously made by *pesme* and widespread gusle performances became increasingly marginalised and, it was argued by contemporary gusle performers (Koprivica, 24/12/2008), undermined since World War 2.

Although several gusle 'revivals' have occurred at various times since the 1950s – notably in the late 1980s and 1990s – none have been widespread nor mainstream. The later ones might be most accurately classified as 'ultra-nationalist'. Since the fall of the Milošević government (5 October 2000), a notable tension has occurred within Serbian politics and society with respect to gusle tradition and the cultural significance of Serbian epic and lyric poetry. A significant percentage of the parliamentarians within the Democratic Party (who defeated Milošević's Socialists in 2000 and who have held government since October 2000) have adopted the view that *pesme* and the gusle tradition should be 'left aside'. The position is based upon the argument that the various elements of the gusle tradition are essentially sectarian and potentially divisive and that they are opposed in principle to the multicultural vision of the European Union (Nović, 2006). Regarding this *pesme* and gusle tradition issue, of particular interest is that the 'Socialist Party of Serbia' (who are in coalition with the ruling Democratic Party) are in agreement with the conservative opposition, that is, the 'Serbian

Radical Party', the 'Serbian Progressive Party' (a splinter group from the 'Radicals') and the 'Democratic Party of Serbia' (a splinter group from the Democratic Party).

The position of the conservatives (collectively referred to as the 'Nationalists') is that *pesme* and the gusle tradition are significant components of the fabric of Serbian society, history and culture which should be maintained and supported, especially via the Ministries of Education and Culture. Given the position of the Socialists regarding the matter, a very small majority of Serbian federal parliamentarians endorse the maintenance and promotion of *pesme* and the gusle tradition throughout Serbia. Indeed the alignment of federal parliamentarians for and against the issue is about 51% versus 49%, which is considered by political commentators and academics (and this researcher) as a fairly accurate reflection of the views of the Serbian population (Serbian parliamentary election, 2008).

As performers from the realm of what is essentially an oral tradition, *guslari* learn to respect and promote the gusle from early childhood. There are a few exceptions to this observation. Over the centuries – and especially since World War 2 – the role of *pesme* and gusle tradition within Serbian society and culture has changed considerably. Throughout the various periods of subjugation, occupation and political opposition, Serbian tradition became increasingly approachable only to those with the interest and patience to search among the vast material often hidden in the basements of various institutes, churches, schools and libraries. Indeed, since World War 2 what was once an integral, inherent and active element of Serbian society, history and culture is now followed or practiced only by those with the inclination to value and adhere to the tradition.

6.2 The Audience

Audiences at gusle performances can be divided into three broad categories.

1. Audience members who have been in contact with the tradition since birth, either as a result of the tradition having been practiced regularly within their family or among the people from their close community or village.
2. Audience members who did not learn of the tradition until they reached an age deemed to be suitable, generally at senior primary or junior secondary school level.
3. Audience members who were born outside the region where the gusle tradition is considered to have originated (Central Balkan Peninsula). These individuals are generally considered to be from one of the Serbian Diaspora.

These three categories relate to where the Serb was born, grew up or educated or due to differences in the emphasis placed upon the gusle tradition within the regions or countries to which they either relocated or were placed within, especially as a result of the re-establishment of borders, due to geo-political issues. For example, changes to the borders of regional jurisdictions or countries commonly result in changes to the curricula of schools, particularly with respect to matters of culture and traditions. The often-compelled relocation of Serbs during the various Diasporas – as far back as the late fourteenth century – is seen as a major contributor to the demise over time of gusle tradition within the Serbian populations of the world, particularly since the late-1940s.

Many members of the first, even the second generation of the Serbian Diaspora immediately following World War 2 – both inside and outside of former Yugoslavia – tried to follow and uphold the gusle tradition. Over time, however, subsequent generations have had less and less exposure to the tradition. Nevertheless, Diasporas are often refreshed by newcomers who bring with them vestiges of the former culture and its traditions. There is little doubt that the Diaspora of Serb peoples from many of the regions of old Serbia or in more modern times the former Yugoslavia with deep and historic affiliations with gusle tradition has served to preserve, advance, and in some senses even revive the culture.

During my research journey I encountered different values held about relationships to do with issues such as ethnicity, nationalism, cultural hegemony and the mutation or alteration of textual material of the poetry into contemporary settings regarding contemporary events and with contemporary characters replacing traditional or original ones. This latter consideration is a particularly salient one as it describes the reality of cultural perceptions among many modern Serbs with respect to both the gusle tradition and Serbian epic and lyric poetry.

Researchers have investigated the perceptions of Serbian gusle tradition and Serbian epic and lyric poetry among the Serbs in Serbia and the members of the Serbian Diasporas currently living in Melbourne, Australia. The realms of research listed below included:

- Musical issues such as the organology of the gusle instrument, tuning, horizontal pitch orientation (melodic processes), performance practices
- Gusle performers and the elements of performance, including different narrative styles

- The musical, narrative and social importance of gusle performance for the performers themselves
- The musical, narrative and social importance of gusle performance for audience members
- Serbian literature and Serbian epic and lyric poetry (*pesme*)
- Serbian cultural characteristics and artefacts
- The significance of the Serbian social hierarchy
- The notion of a Serbian cultural ‘signature’ or delineator
- The forms of Serbian tradition, particularly regional variances
- Serbian cultural traditions as a unified – and unifying – phenomenon
- Traditions of similar cultures from the regions of former Yugoslavia
- Serbian history, geography and geo-politics
- Important characters from Serbian history related to Serbian gusle tradition and *pesme*
- Sacred and secular perspectives of Serbs
- The role of the Serbian Orthodox Church regarding gusle tradition and *pesme*
- Political issues related to the gusle tradition and *pesme*
- Serbian patriotism versus Serbian nationalism
- Serbian Diasporas (especially Serbian-Australian Diasporas since the 1940s).

During the research I have discovered that the religious differences between the Slavic peoples of the Central Balkans have had very little effect on their traditional, that is to say pre-Christian and pre-Islamic, cultures. It has been observed by other researcher’s (Lord, 1971) research wherein a large number of the recordings were of Muslim *guslari*) that Serbian traditional culture is fundamentally the same throughout the region – especially in rural areas and the villages.

Almost certainly this similarity is due to the common, Illyrian/Serbian origins of the people and their initial concentration in a relatively small geographic area – that is, the Dinaric regions of Dalmatia, Herzegovina and Montenegro. From a fundamentally music analysis perspective, the folk music of peoples from the Dinaric regions features: unaccompanied singing in two parts with a prevalence of the interval of a major second, vocal ‘shaking’, use

of a specific group of ornaments (essentially extemporaneous to the given performance) and the ending of melodic phrases with ascending (sometimes descending) portamenti.

According to the Serbian ethnomusicologist Dimitrije Golemović,

Serbs are rather attached to wind instruments: (frula, dvojnica/pipe, double pipe), and gusle among strings, which serve to accompany their epic songs, whereas the musical expression of Moslems usually includes *šargija* (a specific form of *tambura* [a plucked, stringed instrument]), and especially an ensemble consisting of a *šargija* and one or two violins. Also associated with the urban milieu, not European, however, but Oriental, is the practice of singing to the accompaniment of the *saz* (another type of *tambura*). Songs the Moslems sing in this case are *sevda linke* (Oriental ballads), in a manner very typical of that culture, with elaborate and richly ornamented melodies and a wide compass of volume. This shows that Serbs who were converted into Islam have, in some cases, replaced the traditional Serbian instruments with traditional Muslim instruments. This also shows that it was not always possible to keep all the traditional elements after conversion into Islam because the sounds of the instruments sometimes automatically reflected the traditional and cultural characteristics of dominant cultural tradition. (Golemović, 1987, p. 16)

6.3 The analysis of recorded and transcribed interviews

As in the Central Balkans, gusle tradition in Australia is much more commonly heard than it is performed. Not uncommonly, those who uphold and seek to preserve the gusle tradition and Serbian *pesme* have dedicated a significant portion of their lives to the genre(s). These devotees often present the view that modern understanding is not capable of adjusting to tradition; that is to say, from their perspective, modern people seek contemporary solutions and understanding rather than seeking guidance from the traditions. They comment that although Serbian *pesme* glorify dignity, fidelity, honesty and national and ethnic pride, these nuclear intentions are often misused, misrepresented or distorted. As a result of these negative perceptions, the gusle tradition is rarely supported by younger generations of Serbs, both inside and outside of Serbia.

None of the Serbian-Australian interviewees reacted dispassionately or indifferently regarding the gusle tradition, a position that was common to all of them. A range of

standpoints were obvious, these were most commonly based upon educational backgrounds, differences and experiences, particularly with respect to the generation of the interview and where and when they were educated. For example, those born in Australia did not understand clearly the meanings of the lyrics from the epic poetry in a way the others, those who were born and educated in Serbia, appreciated it.

The interviewee's born outside Serbia, including Australia, reacted more passionately regarding the Serbian gusle tradition than those born in Serbia. Some interviewees appeared to view the gusle tradition as a form of primitive male chauvinism while others seemed to view the tradition almost oppositely, that is from a contemporary and 'living' perspective. For example, Sanja Drljača a music teacher, sees the gusle tradition as a form of "primitive tradition exclusively for men" (Drljača, 2008, pers. com.) while Stanislava Stojisavljević, a pedagogy teacher, believes that "the gusle tradition have equal amount of love as any other lyric poetry (Stojisavljević, 2009, pers. com.).

This research seeks to identify the range of perceptions regarding the gusle tradition and general Serbian cultural traditionalism by way of interviewing people from different generations with differing interests, educational backgrounds, cultural affiliations (or not) and social standing.

The information gathered from my research explained the purposes of the research; particularly the researcher's desire to extend research in the field that incorporates finer details and observations regarding Serbian-Australians, to undertake an exploration of the gusle tradition from a range of aspects and perspectives, to foster and progress interest for Serbian gusle tradition, and, for those who are highly interested in and familiar with the tradition, to refresh, extend and enrich their knowledge. It was important to ensure that those interviewees with limited prior knowledge of Serbian culture and the gusle tradition were not influenced by the views or awareness of the researcher and that the interview sessions and question topics were suitable for all of the participants, no matter their general interests or specific backgrounds.

Much of the literature analysed and reviewed was written in Serbian. The internet was useful with respect to locating and establishing the availability of some of the lesser known printed resources (both inside and outside of Serbia), and indeed as an initiative mechanism for

exploration into arenas that might need to be researched such as the record of the oldest known Serbian epic poem or accuracy of historical events described in the certain poem, “The Kosovo battle” for example.

There is no general agreement regarding the origins of gusle tradition. Accordingly, any research into Serbian gusle tradition demands must include Illyrian/Serbian and Balkan historical and cultural investigations. By way of observations of cultural, societal, political and spiritual/religious aspects of Serbian gusle tradition, I sought to ascertain the scopes and dimensions of the genre and to establish the extent to which the tradition is connected with other aspects of social life amongst Serbs, and especially members of the Serbian Diasporas since World War 2 in Melbourne, Australia. Gusle is one of many ancient musical performance traditions still practiced in the modern world. The nucleus of its performance attributes has survived an array of changes throughout the long period of its existence. Despite there being a fairly limited body of research and written sources regarding the genre, the tradition has remained alive in people’s minds and in actual performance over time. Ostensibly, musically-supported delivery of the poem enhances the emotional and spiritual content and the didactic intent of the work. When *pesme* are read or even recited the levels of tension, aggression, passion and the range of emotional subtleties are difficult to deliver to any degree other than that which is attained via the musical contributions of the gusle instrument when performed by a proficient *guslari*.

6.4 The analytical overview of the interview questions

How old is the gusle instrument and where do you think the gusle tradition began?

From amongst all of the interviewees, certainly the most accurate and authoritative respondent to this question was Slavko Aleksić, a retired Professor of Serbian Literature, renowned gusle performer and expert on the gusle tradition. His experience as a gusle performer and a preserver of the gusle tradition, as well as his work as professor of literature attest to his authority. Aleksić was born in Nevesinje, Herzegovina and currently lives in Belgrade, Serbia.

His view is that gusle might have originated in Asia, this opinion supported by his own travels to Egypt where he heard Egyptian folk performers playing an instrument with similar sound and design as the gusle. Although unable to name the instrument, he recalled that its

sound was quite similar to that of the Serbian gusle. The Egyptian instrument had more than one string and the manner in which it was used to accompany songs reminded him specifically of gusle performance (Aleksić, 2006, pers. com.).

A different opinion was presented by Đordije Koprivica, born in a village near to the city of Nikšić in Montenegro, who lives and works in Belgrade. Koprivica regularly tours the world (including Australia) as perhaps one of the five best known contemporary gusle performers. His view is that “the gusle is a unique instrument with a history much older than the Bible, – what Christians call the Old Testament (Koprivica, 26/10/2006).

Further, Koprivica stated that he has found descriptions of the gusle instrument in more than thirty places in the Bible. Koprivica did not provide exact references for the thirty “description”. I hypothesise that he was referring to perhaps as many as 30 mentions – not descriptions – of stringed instruments [Hebrew: ‘nebel’] throughout the whole of the *Tanakh* or Jewish Bible – the Old Testament. Some translated versions (the King James Bible, Amos 5:23) of the *Tanakh* refer to some stringed instruments as *viols* – implying bowed instruments – but other translations refer to the same stringed instruments as psalteries, lyres or harps, which are not bowed.

No other interviewees were so explicit about the origins of the gusle as Koprivica was. Hence all interviewees were totally united in the view that the gusle are a Serbian instrument and that gusle performance relates specifically to Serbian cultural heritage. Koprivica stated “gusle tradition is Serbian tradition” (Koprivica, 2006, pers. com).

The evidence from those two interviews indicate that the modern gusle instrument is probably unchanged from the ancient instruments hence it is likely that the sound and construction processes have remained essentially the same through the ages. Furthermore, many of the underlying historical, apocryphal, educational, spiritual and cultural functions of the instrument and the tradition itself have remained fundamentally consistent for many centuries.

This study confirms that the word gusle (or gusli, or gusla or housla) – ‘bowed, stringed instrument(s)’ – is found in many Slavic languages, from Serbian to Russian to Czech/Slovak. However, whilst the Czech/Slovak use of the term is essentially generic

(basically ‘violin’ or ‘viol’) the Russian use of the term (‘gusli’) refers to a specific instrument and the Serbian use of the term (‘gusle’) refers to a different, specific instrument.

Koprivica remarked that

It is sometimes argued that the Serbian gusle is not of Illyrian/Serb/Slavic origin but rather an adaptation of the Arab *rebab* that was introduced to the Serbs by the Muslim Ottomans. (Koprivica, 26/10/2006)

In the views of all the interviewees from both Serbia and Australia, there was no doubt whatsoever that the gusle tradition is exclusive to ethnic Serbs and that, since the fourteenth century, the subsequent appearance of the tradition amongst other ethnic groups in that region of the Balkans was related directly to conversions of religion and enforced territorial/national re-organisations. Koprivica noticed

There are other nations with gusle tradition. I was in a position to meet Muslims and Croatians who sang with the gusle. However, this people who have changed the religion, from of some reasons, have kept their tradition and cultural customs. They have known the background of their origin and even the family surnames of their ancestors. (Koprivica, 26/10/2006)

According to Koprivica,

regardless of modified religious affiliations resulting from conversions (Orthodox to Catholic or Muslim) or changed citizenship within a re-organised political entity (Serbian to Bosnian or Croatian), the ethnic background of a given family can be suggested by their surname. Virtually without exception modern Bosnian Muslims, Catholic Herzegovines and Catholic Dalmatians (Croats), for example, have ethnic Serbian surnames. (Koprivica, 26/10/2006)

Dordje Stojković said that

Without exception, Serbs believe that there is absolutely no doubt that the gusle tradition is originally Serbian and that it is a (perhaps the) quintessential component

of Serbian culture and heritage. The magnitude of the gusle tradition to Serbian culture and heritage is widely accepted by ethnic Serbs almost exclusively, however. Despite the social and political differences amongst the peoples of the modern nation of Serbia, it is not disputed that the great majority of the citizenry accept and agree that the gusle tradition and Serbian epic and lyric poetry are the most defining and exemplary cultural components of the Serbs. It is important to say that Serbian-Australians of all generations share this view. (Stojković, 08/05/2008)

What materials are used to make gusle?

The interview participants who were born in areas where gusle were one of the very few musical instruments available and where gusle were made, have at least a basic awareness of the materials used and perhaps some understanding of the processes involved with gusle making. These interviewees were also familiar with where the required wood(s) and other materials are to be found for making gusle. One would expect that most participants unfamiliar with these considerations – especially those born in cities or outside of Serbia, in Australian, for example – and with little or no need to contemplate issues of traditional gusle instrument making would be less knowledgeable about gusle structure and materials.

Surprisingly, almost all of the interviewees had at least rudimentary acquaintance regarding the type(s) of timber used, the fact that the instrument has a goat skin top and that the string(s) – both sounding and on the bow – are made of horse's hair. Indeed, I did not anticipate the demonstrated extent of knowledge and awareness regarding the materials and basic processes in gusle making, especially amongst such a wide age group and cross-section of native Serbs and Serbian-Australians.

The interviewees who are involved professionally with gusle performance had a very clear and detailed understanding of gusle manufacturing processes; likewise scholars of the tradition. With respect to the older, non-professional interviewees, especially those born in Serbia, the high level of knowledge regarding materials used in and processes involved with gusle making might be as a result of knowledge gained during the years of their primary and secondary education when a study of gusle tradition was a component of the educational program of former Yugoslavia – at least until perhaps 1990. Nevertheless, gusle tradition and Serbian epic poetry are still an important part of education program in Serbian schools. (Službeni glasnik Republike Srbije, 2008)

The Australian-born interviewees were a notable surprise. It appears that their awareness of the materials and processes for making the gusle stem from information provided to them by their parents, perhaps coupled with attendance at Serbian 'weekend schools' in Melbourne. Interestingly, all of the gusle performers interviewed indicated that their personal experiences regarding the making of their own gusle started with a search for the appropriate timber and involvement with the appropriate processes of timber preparation, remaining fairly close to the process until the creation of the final product. It is a traditional belief that in this way the instrument and the performer become 'close' to one another; such that a spiritual bond is created between them which results in a more powerful, passionate and overall higher quality performance. Slobodan Čičarević stated

That's right. When a man make gusle and when he hears the sound of the gusle, he recuperates, strengthens and spiritually grows.
(Čičarević, 22/02/2008)

Here Čičarević supports the notion of physical and psychological power accredited to the gusle tradition.

Australian born Milan Milutinović gives his view regarding the choice of timber for gusle making,

It was explained to me by the gusle makers from Serbia that the choice of the timber is one of the most important steps in gusle making and it needs to be done with great care. The quality of the sound depends on the quality of the timber and if it was not of good quality the whole process is nothing but a waste of the time. There is no good sound from a bad timber as there is not good work by the unskilled craftsman.

What is the origin of your family name and when was the first time you saw the gusle?

These two questions relate to the family background of the interviewees. This shows that the level of appreciation for the gusle instrument and tradition, mostly, depends on the place of birth and early childhood.

Since the papal policy of converting the Slavs (11th century), the invasion of the Balkans by the Ottomans (14th century) followed by the invasions and territorial acquisitions of the

Habsburg Dynasty (from the 16th century) Orthodox Christian population of the Balkans were under constant pressure to convert to Catholicism or Islam. Milan Vojnović stated

Families, whole villages, even entire regions that could not resist the enforced conversions usually retained their original, Serbian/Slavic surname nevertheless, often replacing only the given name in accordance with the new religion. For example, the Serbian Orthodox given name of *Ilija* was altered to the Turkish name of *Alija*; the Orthodox given name of (“born on Sunday”) was altered to the Catholic/Latin name *Dominik* (“(of) Sunday”). (Vojnović, 03/02/2007)

Đorđije Koprivica explained

Since my birth the first sound I heard from an instrument was the gusle. My father also would sing a bit with the gusle, so I had no other choice but the gusle. „, the gusle is a Serbian instrument, even though there are other people who use them, but they also know their origins. Those people were tricked and because of other circumstances they changed their faith, but retained their customs and culture. They also know from which surname they derive from. (Koprivica, 2006)

As a result, in the states of former Yugoslavia it is often difficult to be certain of someone’s nationality via the surname alone. Further, in some instances it is hard to be certain of Serbian rather than Croatian nationality because the given and family names indeed not differentiate the nationality according to the dominant religion. Hence, nationalities can be established only via religious affiliation and the individual’s heritage and national allegiance. That is to say, in many instances one must ask in order to establish whether or not someone is Serbian or Croatian as neither of their names will not make this clear. In practice, virtually all Christian Serbs are Orthodox and virtually all Christian Croats are Roman Catholic. According to Đorđije Koprivica

most of the families were “tricked” or “cheated” when they changed their names in that the families were tacitly guaranteed a better and safer life – which often did not come to pass, however. In many instances it was necessary to convert to the dominant religion of the region in order to work in the public service, serve in the military or, in

some instances, to receive an education, to own or work the land or perhaps indeed to work at all. (Koprivica, 2006)

Within a generation or two, converts were called “Vlachs” by the Muslims (a derisive term meaning stupid convert) and “poturice” by the Serbs (also a derisive term meaning “Muslim convert” – literally became Turkish – and generally implying gutless). In contemporary society, name-based on differences between the Serbian Muslim population and people from Serbian/Croatian heritages is much more obvious because Muslims select given names of their children from Islamic tradition. Notably, there is no record of either Muslim given names or surnames in the whole of the areas of former Yugoslavia which precede the fourteenth century invasions by the Ottoman Turks. A huge majority of modern Serbian and Croatian surnames originate from the ancient areas of Bosnia and Serbia (Raška) (see Figure 3 that follows), most of modern Serbia, Bosnia and Herzegovina and Montenegro. It was important to notice this because a large number of the poems in gusle tradition were related to the problem of religious conversions, change of names and surnames and national inheritance.



Fig. 3 Map source: "Kosovo: History of a Balkan Hot Spot" U.S. Central Intelligence Agency, Office of DCI Interagency Balkan Task Force, June 1998.

Half of the interviewees (11 of 22) were born in villages of the Dinaric region of Montenegro, Bosnia and Herzegovina and Serbia. Three of them – Slavko Aleksić, Djordjije Koprivica and Slobodan Čičarević – recall attending gusle performances since the earliest days of their childhood and commented that, as children, the gusle was the most common musical instrument that they knew of. Koprivica remembered

I was born in *Banjani* next to *Nikšić* in Montenegro. There were no more instruments beside gusle. (Koprivica, 26/10/2006)

Čičarević stated

I am from *Štitari*, that is a village in the *Lješanska* area near *Cetinje*, in the municipality of *Cetinje* in Montenegro. Gusle were very popular instrument in my village. Almost every man knew to play gusle at reasonable good level.

These men commented that almost every home in their village would have had a gusle and that someone in each of the households would be able to play the instrument and to perform *pesme* as a *guslari*. Families – both nuclear and extended – were often quite large and over the generations, despite enormous material and human losses caused by constant wars and poverty, families managed to maintain their Serbian traditions as a matter of both honour and cultural preservation.

The tradition was preserved steadfastly, often via the children being introduced to the gusle tradition and Serbian epic and lyric poetry from within the home itself, that is to say, through experiencing regular performances of gusle by their parents and close relatives. This phenomenon is the hallmark of a genuine, oral, folk tradition inasmuch as the recipients (the children) do not receive the tradition by way of attendances at performances by professionals but rather at the knees of their parents and relatives. In addition, the tradition was (and sometimes is) maintained and fostered from within the child's formal education. Zoran Plemić still remembered the time he started to learn about gusle

I began as a child listening to other well known and not so well known gusle players. I was born in the period of communism in the former Yugoslavia where the Serbian gusle were not very popular. Because I was born in Sarajevo, the capital of current Bosnia, I can attest to how it was during the peaceful years and how national differences were overcome. We had Muslim gusle players, the most well known being Mujo Novalić, while the Croats had Željko Šimić and Mile Krajina. I must say that in my family communist understanding was dominant, so my gusle playing wasn't very well received, but at the same time my sister wrote prose and taught me how to play the gusle. As a child of that age I wasn't allowed to sing of Serbian heroes, but rather of heroes from the communist time. (Plečić, 2006)

The interviews indicated that, especially since the end of World War 2, young people not born in rural areas of the Dinarides – for example, those born in the cities of modern Serbia or even in Australia – have managed to garner at least a rudimentary knowledge of the tradition. However, the extent of the cultural transference and the perceived importance of the Gusle tradition itself have diminished significantly within the younger generations, mainly as a result of successive Serbian migrations/Diasporas which have resulted in various changes to the “core” of Serbian society, especially with respect to culture and traditions, and as a result

of access to modern communication and entertainment technologies generally dominated by Western cultures and sub-cultures, especially those of North America. Milan Milutinović noticed that

Educating the generations of Serbs and giving them knowledge about history and dealing with obstacles gusle were able to increase the hope of better tomorrow. These valuables have been tending by gusle tradition. (Milutinović, 28/09/2007)

Within Australia, contemporary Serbian families often find it very difficult to maintain interest in Serbian traditions and to engender a sense of cultural identity to their children, especially via gusle. Unless determined efforts are made by their parents, young Serbs in Australia have few chances to develop the ‘taste’ necessary to appreciate the gusle tradition. Hence the likelihood of them embracing the tradition is not great and, apparently, decreasing continuously.

My younger brother and I were born in Australia, so I could say for myself that I am an Australian. I did not have the chance to learn how to play the gusle, but I like to hear them. While I lived in Serbia I firstly did not know the significance of the gusle, but later I understood that that is a traditional instrument of the Serbian people and that in this instrument is intertwined so much emotional, historic and people’s experience and wisdom. (Milutinović, 28/09/2007)

Presently, cultural genres such as the gusle performance tradition, *pesme* and traditional Serbian folk music are outside the purview of an increasingly large number of Australian young people of Serbian extraction. Certainly not uniquely, Australian society features Western European and US-dominated media and education sectors, a Western capitalist lifestyle, and a broadly pervasive attitude that essentially expects assimilation into Australian culture and anticipates the on-going ‘setting aside’ of previous ethnic and cultural connections in order to be genuine “Aussies”. Đorđe Stojković stated,

I must admit that I love Australia the same way I love Serbia but there is one big difference between these two systems. In Serbia like in any other European country it is possible to watch TV programs from all over the world. In Australia, every single TV program is from USA including News and movies, and that is sometimes

frustrating. Also when I was in a primary school in Serbia we were learning a lot about the world. In Australian schools world is shrunken to USA and Great Britain which is not just unfair but incorrect as well. (Stojković, 2008)

Tijana Stojisavljević has a different view from Stojković

The difference between Serbia and Australia is huge. It is possible to compare to the difference between apple and tomato. They are both round and red but they taste different. If you live in Australia you do not need to know about anything else. Australia is an island, far from the rest of the world. According to that an average Australian does not learn much about the rest of the world. Everything is pointed towards Australia, or I should say USA, like there is no other country in the world. On the other side, if you live in Europe you can go through five different countries driving a car for only ten hours. All those countries have their languages and other social characteristics and that is the way how we learn a lot about others. (T. Stojisavljević, 2009)

The USA and Australia are comparatively young nations and, perhaps especially as a result of immigration and the ethnic melting pot phenomenon, their cultures are an amalgamation of various elements from world cultures (even though perhaps fundamentally Anglo-Celtic). It can be argued that as a result of an incorporation of a range of cultural elements from their immigrant populations, these 'melting pot' nations managed to create societies and economies of considerable international significance. A series of events in the fairly recent past, especially since the late-1980s, have, served to deepen and even crystallise the differences between ethnic groups, often both within and outside of nations, and especially within developed countries with significant migrant populations from across a range of ethnicities. According to Milan Milutinović

We know that the Australian nation is young a young nation. Australia exists only about a century, as opposed to our homeland Serbia which was created a more than a thousand years ago. Only in this fact we see a great difference. However, we must know that people have been coming to these shores mainly after the war. The goal was to find a new and better life. We still do not know is it fair to say that multiculturalism in Australia will work for a long time. This is because the wounds

from the past regarding government atrocities against local aboriginal populations were not healed yet.

Miroљjub Stanković does not believe in multiculturalism. He stated

We will see what will happen in a future when a white majority in Australia becomes a minority. What cultural elements will be recognised as the cultural characteristics of Australian nation? That will definitely turn over the whole story about successful multiculturalism projects in Australia. Then, when the problem gets bigger the Australian government will have a better understanding of the problems we faced in former Yugoslavia or even worst, in Kosovo. (Stanković, 2008)

From the researcher's point of view, increasingly it appears that ethnic and cultural differences, both within countries and between countries, are sources of tension, turmoil and conflict. More and more, it seems, the rhetoric from some sectors of the "melting pot" nations of the world (especially) indicates dismay, sometimes disdain, regarding the ethnic and cultural diversity of their populations. Investigations into issues related to the repression of immigrant cultures and the assertion of cultural control by the existing dominant society and ethnicity— particularly within societies of modern, developed countries with significant immigrant populations, will no doubt constitute a significant and constructive, perhaps vital, field of future socio-cultural research.

What was and is the role of gusle and to what extent has gusle text changed over time?

These two different questions were merged into one because the role of the gusle tradition over time was to inform and educate. This information's were often constructed to serve the purpose of the church or aristocracy and to emphasize the national feelings when needed.

Mile Nović has noticed

Serbian gusle are not able to lie. That is not the truth. Gusle have lied a lot. We can name that as artistic imagination or fantasy. (Nović, 2006)

In the view of Luka Rakočević

the way my forefathers held the tradition, that's how I keep to it as well. Our ancestors said that it is one of the oldest instruments and they were proud of that. They would often say that the gusle would be Serbian conversation. (L. Rakočević, 2007)

Stevan Berber appreciates the role of gusle in the past and present

During the times of foreign occupations gusle were the only way to transmit the word, news and to continue the line of Serbian language. Nowadays, we honour gusle to thank for everything they did for a Serbian surviving during the hard times. (Berber, 2009)

The opinions of most of the interview participants reflected the level of their involvement with and knowledge of the gusle tradition. The unanimous view of the interviewees was that awareness and the preservation of gusle tradition is extremely important, primarily because it is a significant element of "old" Serbian heritage and culture. Đorđije Koprivica stated "In Serbian homes gusle are placed almost next to Icons" (Koprivica, 2006, pers. com.).

Regarding the issue of most of the lyrics/text having been modified over time, the consensus of opinion – from those interviewees aware of this phenomenon – was that the practice was/is common hence it should be accepted. Furthermore, there was a general view that it is not a consideration that should be judged by general audiences – that is, by non-experts. Đorđije Koprivica noticed "Gusle epic songs contains rather more history then poetry. But, there is nothing wrong with that. It is, maybe, even better and definitely is not a weakness" (Koprivica, 26/10/2006).

This second issue is one which perhaps needs to be disputed and resolved amongst relevant scholars and Serbs with deeper knowledge and interest in Serbian history, heritage, culture and politics. Most of the interviewees proffered the view that the preservation of culture and traditions must remain the highest priority. Mile Nović said that

the entire Serbian folkloric creativity the folk songs are most valuable. In the folkloric songs most valuable is the heroic epic, and in the epic poetry it is the Kosovo cycle. This is the generally accepted view in Serbian literature. (Nović, 2006)

Beyond this position, most of the interviewees indicated the view that songs from recent Serbian history – mostly those from the civil wars in former Yugoslavia during the 1990s – should not be intermingled with the *pesme* of the “old times”. Mile Nović noticed that “I do sense something else to. Many people today use gusle in a wrong way. That is why I call today’s gusle performance-heated gusle” (Nović, 2006, pers. com.).

Even though the “new” songs are similar in form, style and performance practise, a majority of the interviewees did not consider them to be components of genuine, traditional gusle performance. Most of the interviewees – indeed many other members of the broader Serbian community, especially in Melbourne – feel “distanced” from the text of the new songs and frequently indicated that they preferred not to listen to them. Sanja Drljača stated

I have learned old poems in Serbian school and I like that poems. Also, I had a chance to hear the new one but those poems hurt my feelings. I do not consider that poems as a part of the gusle tradition. (Drljača, 2008, pers. com.)

It is important to note that there is indeed an audience for the new songs, especially amongst the Serbian refugees of, primarily, Bosnia and Croatia who fled these regions – both to Serbia and outside of former Yugoslavia – during the wars in the last decade of the 20th century. As refugees with this background comprise the majority of the Serbian Diaspora in Australia – and other developed countries – the market is indeed comparatively large.

It has been explained to the researcher by Aleksić and Plemić, as the supporters of gusle, that feature the “new” songs, that they are practising a form of dissent against the broader international community, especially the developed countries within NATO, who have placed a kind of *de facto* ban on the material within these songs rather than perhaps respecting the rights of Serbs who were forced to leave their homes, especially during the wars of the 1990s. Zoran Plemić said

I don’t deny the historic and artistic value of epic poetry, but I mostly like to present songs with a theme of newer history. The most popular songs with the people are the ones from the nineties of the 20th century with a theme of war in the former Yugoslavia. (Plemić, 27/09/2006)

These people will probably never be able to become a part of Australian culture or society and the new songs are an expression of both patriotism and cultural nationalism, which is their right. They commonly reject opposing influences or viewpoints of any kind, often refuting the possibility of any compromise of their views that might make it possible for them to return to a life without rejection and intolerance (as they put it). Almost without exception the creators of the new songs share these social perspectives. For example, Slobodan Čičarević said

When I came to Australia I didn't speak English. I don't even know it well now. You know, when you come to a foreign land the foreign sun doesn't shine that well. Then I would take the gusle and when I would feel bad, talk to them.

(Čičarević, 2008, pers. com)

These performers honour those who are, in their view, “new heroes” of the wars. Their internal emotions are reflected in the descriptions of these heroes and their own versions of the conflicts. Even a brief observation of the text and content of most of the new songs makes it clear that they are descriptions of events and characters that are not consistent with what are generally considered to be the factual accounts. For example, Zoran Plemić said

The most respected figures in the songs are people that the Serbian people regard as heroes, but our enemies as war criminals. I believe that history will show where the real place for these Serbian heroes lies. My favourite song that I first recorded and sang with the gusle is ‘The Hague Court’ that expresses the Serbian opinion of the Hague tribunal. (Plemić, 27/09/2006)

In the “old” songs, among many other qualities, considerable attention is given to artistry. Further, there was notable attention devoted to attempts to be historically authentic. Slobodan Čičarević noticed “Maybe they were able to change the text, but they were not able to change the happenings. The gusle sing of battles and rulers and happenings from those times” (Čičarević, 2008, pers. com.).

Another feature was the common practice of honouring the positive and admirable qualities of the enemies. Contrastingly, the new songs neither respect the enemies nor is the notion of artistry an obvious consideration.

The text is belligerently against the enemy and, as Nović has often commented, it is “heated patriotism” (Nović, 2006, pers. com.) where the gusle tradition is used as a vehicle for ‘negative nationalism’. This negative brand of gusle should not be compared with the qualities and values of the gusle tradition, the beauty of Serbian epic poetry nor the artistry of gusle performance, all of which combined to place Serbian culture amongst the great traditions of Europe.

As mentioned earlier, the role of gusle within Serbian society and culture has changed significantly since World War 2. From its previous educative, informational and entertainment roles, gusle performance has been transformed into a type of traditionalistic curiosity. According to Mile Nović, “gusle should be placed in a museum” (Nović, 2006). He feels that gusle had a particular purpose during the old times but that the role should no longer be significant in modern, post-WW2 Serbian society. Notably, Nović cited the use of gusle as a mechanism of ‘negative nationalism’ (Nović, 2006, pers. com.).

As a professor of Serbian literature, Nović appreciates the beauty of Serbian poetry, but he believes that the text of modern-day *pesme* recalls, reflects and perhaps advances aggressive patriotism – that it conjures “the ghosts of war” (Nović, 2006, pers. com.). Nović stated that,

every time they went to war they said ‘it’s in the name of God’, and all sides in the wars have used the same (poems) to uplift the spirits of the warriors. They have also used the epic poetry and the heroes from the past to justify their current interests (agendas). (Nović, 2006, pers. com.)

Serbian people suffered enormous casualties during the wars of the 20th century. Nović believes that the accounts of those struggles should be put aside in order that the Serbian people can move forward with principally the positive and artistic aspects of their heritage. In this way, Nović’s view is that traditional Serbian poetry and gusle tradition should continue to be appreciated from a fundamentally heritage-based perspective and accordingly should be

preserved and valued as a genre of recognisable, national expression. Berber supports Nović's approach,

Gusle tradition is our national heritage and it should be preserved, not just by the individuals. The Serbian government should do more to increase the level of interest and care for national cultural treasure primarily amongst the children. (Berber, 2009)

Nović's view is that recent Serbian songs/poems that glorify the roles and exploits of participants in more recent wars are yet to be evaluated (especially regarding ethics and historical verity). Hence Serbs should remain cautious and reserved regarding contemporary *pesme* and gusle performance. Further, Nović believes that most of the new songs/poems should not be considered a part of the tradition but rather as a new movement within the broader gusle genre. Essentially, Nović's view is that the contemporary songs/poems should not constitute a part of the Serbian annals of epic and lyric poetry but nevertheless part of a new movement within the broader gusle genre.

Dordije Koprivica confirmed that original (traditional) texts have been modified to a very great extent over time. Indeed, the original historical accuracy of many events found in the traditional works have been modified, sometimes extensively, in order to serve the purpose/s of rulers, politics, disputes, and so forth of the given era. Koprivica also stated a view that members of the Serbian Orthodox Church, themselves followers of gusle tradition in large numbers, have used Serbian epic poetry and gusle performance to "seed", spread and preserve Christianity among the populations of the Balkan Peninsula, particularly between the 15th and 18th centuries of the modern era. Koprivica said

However, when I spoke to people of the Church, even with the Metropolitan, they said that as certain people brought to the Holy Infant gold, myrrh, and frankincense, so did the Slavs, amongst whom were Serbs, brought their language, culture and gusle. (Koprivica, 2006, pers. com.)

In addition, the primary role of gusle tradition was the preservation of positive spirit and self image within the Serbian population during the time of the Ottoman occupation.

Koprivica, Čičarević and Aleksić maintains that this positive spiritual and cultural reinforcement role is the most significant one.

Slavko Aleksić shares the view that some of the people from recent Serbian history should not be incorporated or mixed with gusle tradition. He thinks that time is needed to affirm the significance of the contemporary individuals and accounts of events and, if deserving, these will come to be valued and celebrated by future Serbs. Aleksić nevertheless sees the gusle tradition as being a “living art” and is of the view that a renaissance of gusle tradition has existed since the early 1990s (Aleksić, 2006, pers. com.).

He believes that the purpose of contemporary gusle is to describe and record events with total accuracy. He considers that future generations need to appreciate and value the tradition but that this is not possible if historical events are changed or disrupted by way of glorifying unsavoury characters or events, by favouring suspicious qualities or by presenting historically false or biased accounts from recent Serbian history. He feels that the events should be verified and the individuals deemed creditable before they are documented and glorified, both artistically and culturally. He said

Serbs will difficultly be understood in Europe if in our songs are mentioned people who are characterized as war criminals, or current politics. I personally respect those people and to not regard them as criminals, but I see no connection with our gusle and epic. The present is not for epics and time will sift through what is good. This is why certain Serbian politicians have stated that we cannot enter Europe with the gusle, but it must be said that the guilt lies with certain gusle players and not the Serbian tradition. (Aleksić, 2006, pers. com.)

What are the themes in the songs performed by gusle performers?

This question highlighted that most of the general knowledge of the interviewees regarding the gusle tradition and especially the topics and issues within most of the epic songs focus on the Battle of Kosovo (1389) and related subsequent events. A few of the interviewees knew very much about epic songs dealing with the period before the Kosovo battle. Archaeological, historical and ethnological findings in modern Serbia and several other countries of the Balkans have provided a newer perspective regarding the origin, age, purposes and linguistic and ethnic roots of epic poetry in the Balkan Peninsula (Jacanović, 2007).

The common view amongst contemporary Serbs is that the epic songs relate to the heroes and history of the Ottoman occupation of Serbia. One of the interviewees Slavko Aleksić does not share this view. His opinion is that the heroes of the epic songs replaced the ancient Slavic pagan gods; hence the characteristics, realms of patronage, significance and powers attached to the heroes were able to serve the necessary purposes as the given times required.

Aleksić maintains (Aleksić, 2006, pers. com.) that it is only the cycles of songs related to the struggles for liberation of the Serbs and the Montenegrins from Turkish occupation that include verifiable elements that are found in other historical accounts from that period. Most of the epic songs from the period before the late fourteenth century are almost entirely unsupported by independent historical accounts.

As highlighted above, much of the text of almost all of the songs has been modified or adjusted to suit or support a range of objectives, from political to nationalistic to spiritual to cultural. Indeed, most of the songs were modified in particular to serve the purposes of the Christian church, initially in order to augment and support the act of Christianisation of local populations and later in attempts to defend Christianity from increasing conversions to Islam throughout the region. In considering the heroic aspects of Serbian epic poetry, Koprivica contends that

the glorification of the heroes provided a degree of hope and identify for a repressed population, that is that without the near deification of the heroes, the glorification of their exploits and the extolling of their roles and virtues, the spirit and social cohesion of the Serbs would probably have been destroyed. Further, these accounts of the heroes and heroic events served to educate motivate and inspire youth, not only culturally but also when young men were prepared for battle during periods of insurrection where the songs were used as a constant reminder that their ancient homeland was occupied by aliens who needed to be defeated and removed. (Koprivica, 2006, pers. com.)

Zoran Plemić, is a Bosnian-Serb from the Republic of Srpska (formerly the Serbian sector of Bosnia), a professional gusle performer and a staunch Serbian nationalist who performs mostly songs written about the recent Yugoslavian war in 1990s. Plemić believes that the modern songs reflect the reality of the events to which they relate. That is, he believes in the

veracity of every word that he sings; that the individuals, themes, issues and heroic elements presented in the modern songs are undeniably accurate and genuine – beyond doubt or reproach. Plemić argues that the role of the epic songs is inextricably bonded to the themes and issues embodied within them, commenting, for example, that if there was no war we would not need the heroes or the epic songs at all (Plemić, 27/09/2006).

During the study I came to form the view that struggle tends to create the loftiest forms of artistic expression. Serbian epic poetry is an expressive form, the shape, characteristics, roles and focuses of which depend significantly on current socio-political movements and events coupled with the specific need to alter and, perhaps most commonly, strengthen or validate the position and viewpoints of those who create the particular songs and the accounts of events that they portray. Throughout its history, contemporary epic songs are almost invariably focused on war with themes closely related to honour in battle coupled with the suffering and struggles of living under oppression. Throughout the length of their existence, circumstances have created for the Serbs an array of vexatious events, no doubt a primary reason for the artistic expressiveness of much Serbian epic poetry.

Do you know which Serbian epic song is the oldest?

None of the interviewees knew the answer to this question. Indeed, even people involved formally with gusle tradition agree that it is difficult if not impossible to know which epic song is the oldest. Because of the process of changes and modifications regarding characters, events and time frames, attempts to establish for certain which Serbian epic song was first to be created would be conjectural at best. There is consensus between socio-historical and more scientific/empirical researchers that Serbian epic poems/songs were initially created for ritualised celebrations of the Slavic pagan god *Perun*, the supreme god among the Slavs (Leger, 1901, p. 41). It is agreed that the process of creating modern Serbian epic poetry is a continuation of the approach taken since the period prior to the Christianisation of the Serbs, hence it is not really possible to establish definitively which of the epic songs is the oldest nor, indeed, if the truly oldest song any longer exists.

Nović analysed more than one hundred Serbian epic songs. He maintains that Serbian epic songs encompass the whole of the ancient knowledge of the Serb people, especially via allegory, and that they are the foundation of Serbian artistic expression. Djordjije Koprivica claims that while he and Slavko Aleksić were writing their book (*Gusle*, 2006) it was

extremely difficult to find many relevant written resources whatsoever. They found only a small number of documents primarily in Roman Catholic (not Orthodox) church libraries, mainly in Dubrovnik (modern Croatia) and Kotor (modern Montenegro).

Most of the original sources from Serbia (to include Kosovo, Macedonia and Montenegro) and Bosnia and Herzegovina were destroyed during the wars of the 20th century. The largest collection of Serbian archives and antiquities was destroyed by the German bombing of the Serbian National Museum in Belgrade on the 6 April, 1941. It is reasonable to assume that the loss of these records and resources is reflected in the fact that most of the interviewees could name no more than a few titles from the anthology of Serbian epic poetry. Only the devotees and aficionados from the group could approximate the time of creation and name the authors of the most popular of the epic songs. Notably, the versions that these aficionados were most familiar with were re-creations of the old songs done between approximately 1920 and 1980 by the famous *guslari* Radovan Bećirović Trebješki (1898-1986).

Are there gusle players in other nations?

All of the interviewees except Sanja Drljača and Tijana Stojisavljević were aware that there are indeed *guslari* in other nations. Some segments of the populations of Croatia, Bosnia and Montenegro still follow the gusle traditions, including some of the Muslim populations of these nations. As discussed above, these people are vestiges of Serbian populations who were converted from Orthodox Christianity to other religions – such as Roman Catholicism and Islam – and ultimately were assimilated within the various political/national structures of the various regions of the Balkans. During their very long careers as professional *guslari*, Koprivica and Aleksić had numerous opportunities to meet and to perform for these people as well as to meet, hear and discuss the tradition with *guslari* of these peoples. Koprivica and Aleksić indicated the view that the various gusle traditions were essentially identical to the Serbian tradition, apart from Albanian performers who of course performed in Albanian rather than Serbian. Aleksić said

In 1982 I was in Đakovo in Croatia. I was invited by the Croats to come and play the gusle together. We thought that we will play for two hours, but we sang all night. I don't believe that the Serbs would stand so long and listen to the gusle. At the moment when my colleague Rade Jamina sang about the renowned hero Stojan Janković, one for the present Croatian gusle players said: 'that song of ours really is

beautiful. I stopped and said: “How is it yours”? He told me that they were all from Croatia. I answered that maybe they are, but that they are all Serbs. The Croat then asked me whether I knew a song about those Serbs from Croatia, because he didn’t know. Of course I sang him “The wounds of Smiljanić Ilija” when many other Croats gathered and listened to the entire song that lasted 25 minutes. It is obvious in the song that the subjects were of Serbian origin. (Aleksić, 26/10/2006)

In discussions with even the staunchest of Croatian nationalists it is possible to reach agreement that the origins of the Croats who continue to follow the gusle tradition were indeed the same as those Serb and Montenegrin refugees who migrated to Croatia to escape Turkish atrocities. The view of many Croatian nationalists regarding the claimed distinctiveness of the Croatian language is not similarly debatable. Their position on the matter of the origins of the Croatian language seeks to eliminate the crucial influence base from the Serbian language itself and the pivotal roles of Vuk Stefanović Karadžić and Djuro Daničić in the formalisation of the Serbo-Croatian language, the spoken version of which is fundamentally indistinguishable as either Serbian or modern Croatian. With respect to the gusle tradition and Serbian epic poetry, furthermore, it is perhaps interesting to note that as there were no Croatian heroes within traditional epic poetry, the Serbian heroes are claimed as having been Croats. Aleksić commented that the major Serbian hero Kraljević Marko (*The Battle of Kosovo*, for example) is celebrated as having been Croatian despite him having been born and lived in what is now Macedonia and evidently having never visited any region in Croatia throughout his life (Aleksić, 2006, pers. comm.).

Bosnian Muslims have used a similar process as have the Croats; that is, the name Serbian has been replaced by the name Bosnian. Nevertheless, the spoken language has remained likewise fundamentally unchanged. Regarding the heroes, however, the Bosnians have been rather more careful. The events in Bosnian Muslim epic poetry are the same as those of Serbian *pesme*, but the Serbian names have been replaced by Turkish or Arabic names and the heroism of the Serbs has been transmuted to the heroism of the Turks and the Arabs. In addition, the background of some of the modern national heroes found in contemporary epic poetry and gusle are often disguised or distorted. Since the war in Bosnia at the end of 20th century, Bosnian Muslims are generally distancing themselves from all gusle traditions. Muslim society in the Balkan region appears to be tending toward a less moderate, rather more radicalised position and is gravitating more towards essentially Arabic cultures and

traditions. The future relationship between the Muslim tradition and the gusle tradition remains. As a result, it is not unreasonable to assume that Muslim gusle will become no more than a cultural curiosity within two generations.

Are there any female gusle performers?

Among the Serbs in Serbia and neighbouring countries there are very few female *guslari* and there are no records of female gusle performers in Australia. Nevertheless, there have been female gusle performers throughout the cultural history of the Balkans. Vuk Stefanović Karadžić wrote many epic poems that were transcriptions of performances by women. Some of these performances did not include the use of the gusle, nevertheless the term *guslari* applies to these performers. Their delivery style was recitation, but their contributions to the genre are well appreciated and regarded as significant. Koprivica commented that

I have nothing against female gusle performers. It is not (appropriate) for a woman to dress as the (male) hero and to play on a male instrument (however). Somehow it does not come together. (Koprivica, 2008, pers. com.)

Zoran Plemić, another *guslari*, commented further that

it looks funny to see and to hear women saying epic poetry. It is simply not for a woman (to do). Women have no voice to express the tragic momentum in an epic song. They might be better presenting lyric songs, but (even then) strictly as recitals and without the use of the gusle (instrument). Gusle are male instruments. (Plečić, 2006, pers. com.)

Slavko Aleksić, also a *guslari*, commented about the matter via a Montenegrin adage “It would be a shame to kiss anyone’s hand, especially the hand of a woman” (Aleksić, 2006, pers. com.). Aleksić continued

kissing a hand would be an act of great shame. The only exception might be the hand of one’s own mother, but even that is rare. To kiss the hand is the same as surrendering to someone which is to accept the position of a slave. It is a great shame for the hero/man. (Aleksić, 2006, pers. com.)

These statements show that the male gusle performers perceive the gusle tradition as a strictly male practise. Females are placed exclusively inside the poetry and outside the performance practise. By this he seems to mean that for a woman to be involved with the presentation of epic poetry, especially when performed with gusle, lessens the aggression and power of the performance hence the genre itself introduces an element of softness and femininity that has no place within the presentational aspects of the genre. The notion of enslavement relates to the likely transformation of the hyper-masculine genre of epic poetry and gusle performance, particularly the aggressive and violent aspects of warfare, into the female persona and perspective when performed by a woman. Although these three *guslari* claim to have nothing against female performers of the genre, they generally agree that the nature of the performance requirements of gusle are not fundamentally feminine.

The history of the gusle tradition is almost exclusively for males. When women are portrayed in Serbian epic poetry, their role is primarily to farewell or to lament the male characters and heroes. Although there are instances throughout the whole of the tradition – that is, from the 14th century to the present – where women characters engage in battle alongside men, this occurrence is rare. When female characters are portrayed as fighters, they are almost always engaged in covert, revenge-based combat. Notably, the role and the nature of portrayal of women in Serbian epic poetry are not of dominance, leadership or celebrity, but rather of following, supporting and nurturing.

There are a few female gusle players in modern Serbia. As with the men, they are almost always members of various regionally-based gusle societies which operate not only as festival organisers and cultural custodians but also as bookings agencies for their members. Female *guslari* are generally viewed as having a special place in modern of gusle tradition among the Serbs, that of bringing a kind of respectful, artistic detachment to their gusle performances. Notably, all of the female interview participants in this research were surprised by the question itself, that is a question regarding the involvement of women in the gusle performance tradition. All of the female interviewees have seen the gusle tradition as a strictly male tradition. Indeed many of them laughed and some commented that the question was peculiar, an impossibility as there are no female *guslari* – why are you asking this question? (Drljača, 2008, pers. com.). Sanja Drljača never heard of female gusle performers. She believed that female *guslari* do not belong to gusle tradition following the generalised

opinion that gusle is a male instrument and that the tradition itself is based on male performers.

This research as well as a related documentary and historical evidence confirm that female involvement in the gusle performance tradition has always been fairly rare. Throughout the history of the tradition only a small number of females have been *guslari*, and almost all of them recited or narrated the epic songs, that is, they did not play the gusle instrument all with their recitations.

As a devotee of the genre, I would very much favour a substantial increase in the number female *guslari*, but suspect that this is unlikely in the short term. Even though modern societies change rapidly and the roles of women are becoming increasingly less traditional and subordinate, the dominance of established orthodoxy in Serbian society, particularly with respect to gusle tradition, is such that an avenue for bringing about the eventual broad acceptance of female *guslari* is not yet apparent. I believe, nevertheless, that such an eventuality may well be crucial for the re-popularisation and revival of a tradition which is slowly but inevitably losing the support of the majority of Serbs, particularly young Serbs.

The tradition is becoming ever more distanced from most young Serbs, especially females, perhaps because of the perceived old-fashioned performance style as well as the language of the poetry itself – formal and antiquated, albeit beautiful, hence difficult to understand to the point of requiring study to be appreciated and featuring an array of archaic idioms, expressions, concepts and contexts.

Young people especially are no longer being introduced to the tradition in educational scenarios, as was once the case, so, it appears only young people from families that follow the tradition have any exposure to it. An added complication relates to the sheer length of the epic poems themselves. The performance of a complete opus can take as long as three hours. There are a huge number of words in the old poems, rarely fewer than six hundred lines, and the text needs to have been studied to be appreciated fully by the listener, even superficially it could be argued.

Further, events are commonly portrayed or re-presented with nationalistic undertones and various degrees of religious and ethical sermonizing, neither of which appeals very much to

contemporary young people. The role of women in a revival of the tradition could be one of not only refreshing and revitalising but also of fostering and developing the genre via less impassioned, aggressive and politically- and religiously-charged performances in favour of the more artistic, educative, historical and cultural features of the tradition. Indeed, in my without the increased involvement of female *guslari* it may not be possible for the tradition to remain alive for many generations into the future.

What does the term gusle mean to you?

Slobodan Čičrević recalled

When I came to Australia in the early 1970s I was alone. My wife and my kids stayed back in Serbia and I often felt lonely. Gusle was the only friend that I could talk to. Gusle meant everything to me. (Čičrević, 2006, pers. com.)

Most of the interviewees affirmed that Serbian cultural traditions – amongst these the gusle tradition – are sources of considerable pride. It is not only a pride based on notions of national belonging, but also pride in the ability of Serbs to create such a strong mode of cultural expression that they perceive gusle tradition both embraces and engenders. Despite the fact that the gusle is a comparatively simple musical instrument featuring what is often considered an unrefined sound and viewed as boring by some listeners, at least on its own, the union between the music of the instrument and the text or narration endows the performances with a range of artistic perspectives and, it has been argued, elevates the artistic form to one of considerable height and sophistication.

Many Serbs feel that the powerful literary and artistic expression of their ancient style of performance makes their culture, especially with respect to gusle tradition, unique amongst modern European nations. Serbs believe that their gusle tradition places their culture together with a small group of European nations who lay claim to having enriched and developed the cultural, ethical and linguistic merits of Ancient Greece and Rome. Djordije Koprivica commented that

if we avoid the speculations regarding the heritage of the gusle instrument and we look at the issues and themes in Serbian epic poetry, it is commonly argued that gusle tradition is a Serbian tradition (that is) fully engraved into the hearts and minds of

Serbs. There is no other nation in Europe, including Ancient Greeks and Romans – such as Homer, Orpheus, Hesiod and others – to embrace, to follow and to update this kind of cultural and traditional expression (over such a very long period of time).

(Koprivica, 2008, pers.com.)

Nović felt that the whole of the gusle tradition needs to be “placed in the museum” (Nović, 2006, pers.com.) particularly because of its frequent misuse in advocating and fostering conflict and presenting propaganda, especially regarding war. He remarked nevertheless that in times of peace he loves reading classical Serbian epic poetry more than any other literature. Nović continued:

Every time I read the song (epic poem) ‘The Death of Jugović’s Mother’, I catch myself in tears. Tradition is the spirit of our people. We are an old nation with huge respect for our own but also for the traditions of others. That it is why we must avoid the negative connotations in our tradition and aim to win the hearts of those who do not know (about) or who do not understand our culture. Once they learn about us and our heritage they will be in a position to observe more objectively our current position and emotions. (Nović, 2006)

Milenko Stojisavljević stated:

To learn our Serbian history is also to learn the history of others in Europe. Foreigners bring their arrogance, believing that they do not need to learn anything about our ‘barbarian’ history. When they leave it is often with less arrogance, despite having created enormous misery for us and for them. We collect our memories in our songs which celebrate and commemorate the casualties and experiences of all. The enemies do not have the same habit because they come to our lands to rule us rather than to respect us. They do not sing because they know that it is hard to justify a shameless occupation as a heroic act. We have never crossed our lands to occupy (other lands) and that is why we see our casualties as heroes. Those who come to defeat us have the right to glorify their casualties, but they will definitely not sing about them with a similar sense of pride. (Stojisavljević, 25/09/2006)

Tijana Stojisavljević explained that when she came from Serbia to Australia as a five year old child. Tijana stated that she had no chance to learn anything about Serbian history in Australian schools the same way as in fact she did learn much about any other history except some things related to the British (Anglo-Australian) culture. Tijana added,

In Saturday Serbian School – generally (located) at or next to the Serbian Orthodox churches in Melbourne – I learned some details about Serbian history and tradition. My family is very traditional (so) my brother, my sister and I were introduced to the Serbian tradition during the Serbian national celebrations throughout the year and over the years that we lived there. Even (though) I consider myself an Australian, I believe that I will always think of myself as a Serb because my feelings are closely attuned with Serbian traditions, whereas British (Anglo-Australian) tradition means less to me – in the same way as Serbian tradition means little or nothing to the Australians or the British or people from most any other national background. This might be different if Australian culture was considered a mix of the traditions of all people who live in Australia – even despite the young age of the Australian nation. Sometimes I felt somehow forced to accept things that are different from my general view. I do not follow gusle tradition but I have learned something about Serbian epic poetry and I admire the beauty of the songs. I love Australia almost the same way as I love Serbia, but I will always consider the tradition of the Serbs as my own (cultural) tradition. (Stojisavljević, 20/09/2009)

In the view of the researcher, a principal essence of the epic poetry is that, “gusle do not sing to divide, rather, gusle sing to depict the tragedy of divisions”.

Do the carvings on gusle instruments have particular meaning(s)?

The Rakočević family migrated to Australia in the early 1970s. Although they departed the Balkans from their home in Serbia their origins are Montenegrin. With them was a gusle instrument, brought to Australia by plane inside one of their cabin or carry-on bags. As with most traditional Serbs and Montenegrins, owning and displaying a gusle instrument in the home is an obligation for all members of the family. According to Zoran Rakočević and his father Luka Rakočević carvings on gusle instrument are of great cultural importance. The meanings of the carvings are of course symbolic. When interviewed, between them they pointed out that

many important and influential people from Serbian history have found places in the hearts of the Serbian people, assuring their place on the most important Serbian musical instrument. (Carvings of these people mean) there can be no mistake as to the origins of the gusle. With the ornaments on gusle we find a variety of themes and motives symbolizing the virtues of the Serbian nation and certain people significant to Serbian history. (Rakočević, 04/02/2007)

For example, the Rakočević family's gusle instrument features a carving of the tomb of the famous poet, Orthodox bishop and ruler of Montenegro, Petar Petrović Njegoš. The carving also includes the famous Mount Lovćen in Montenegro, the true location of the tomb, which itself is a symbol of Montenegrin and Serbian pride, stoicism and heroism.

There have been numerous examples of what is often considered misuse of carved symbols, themes and images. Mainly following the Second World War some gusle makers were paid to carve symbolic representations or characters related to the war. For example, former president of Yugoslavia Marshall Josip Broz (aka Tito) was often carved on the heads of gusle instruments made after World War 2. In most contemporary discourse there is broad agreement that this practice was an unfortunate episode in the life of the gusle. Indeed, in modern Serbia the practice is viewed as a distortion of national and cultural heritage and, therefore, very few instruments featuring the carved head of Marshall/President Tito still exist.

Carvings of animals, especially predators, are common and perhaps the most popular symbols featured on gusle instruments. Predatory animals perhaps encapsulate directly the disposition and nature of many historical situations and indeed perceptions of the Serbian people regarding their own nature, especially when threatened or wronged. A popular carving is that of an eagle with two claws penetrating the wings of a dragon hence counter-attacking and perhaps threatening seriously the larger and more vicious aggressor. Regarding gusle bows, also almost always carved to include symbols and images, Zoran Rakočević commented that

the bow made for my gusle has the shape of a snake representing the idea that the player has symbolic control over – I will not say evil – but the overall situation; (the notion that) the snake is also a predator or aggressor, let's say. (When carved on

gusle) the wild goat represents the love for freedom, the eagle is the inviolable ruler of the heights, the dragon is the symbol of invincibility, the snake means danger and aggression, and so forth. Another role of the carvings is to ensure that important people and events from the past are not forgotten. (Rakočević, 2007, pers. com.)

Aleksić commented that “If we forget gusle we will forget ourselves” (Aleksić, 2006 pers.com.).

Does the gusle tradition play a role in the Serbian family?

As a traditional musical instrument and a fundamental component of their culture gusle and gusle tradition have for centuries held an important place within Serbian families. As with many other familial and societal issues, however, modern times have brought about an array of changes, some of which have impacted significantly regarding the importance of the instrument and the tradition within contemporary Serbian families.

As mentioned above, Serbian epic poems/songs are dominated by male characters and fundamentally masculine themes and contexts. Although women are included in some capacity in a significant number of the works, they are almost invariably set aside and placed within more observing, lamenting and nurturing roles. It is here argued that female characters have received much less attention than they deserve. In the complete collection of songs relatively few women are depicted as heroes and when they are so depicted it is almost always from the perspective of how they support, console or relate to the male hero. Women are most commonly presented as mothers, daughters, sisters, wives, mothers-in-law, daughters-in-law, aunts, and so forth. Women are rarely depicted as rulers, warriors, heroes, makers of policy or statespersons. In a most instances they are, nevertheless, depicted as exemplars of loyalty, virtue, fidelity and wisdom.

In 2009 Aleksić published a book entitled simply *Women in Epic Songs* (Aleksić, 2009). He explored the degree to which women have been included in Serbian epic poetry and sought to illuminate the significance of the role of women included in the entire anthology of works. His compendium contains sections of sixty selected epic songs wherein women are presented within the body of the narrative. Aleksić devotes some attention to the relative length of these sections in comparison to the complete work from which they are taken. All of the epic songs are analysed and explained and commentary by. Aleksić illuminates the message of the given

song and includes background information for potential use by *guslari* or announcers prefacing performances. Aleksić is of the view that female-related sections of the songs he has selected were created in such a way that nothing can nor should be added to or removed from them without risking irreparable damage to their meanings, contexts, historical perspectives and veracity, cultural accoutrements, and so forth. It is his view that any added commentary or change by a performer would be a “sting to the beauty of folkloric, epic expression” (Aleksić, 2009, p. 63).

The relationships between grandfather/father and grandson/son apropos the transmission of the gusle tradition highlight and validate the roles of the males in the family. The fundamental role of the adult Serbian male is to educate and prepare his sons, especially, to be future heads of their own families. Adopting the gusle tradition, with both its positive and negative components, was viewed as being critical to the successful execution of this responsibility. Throughout much of Serbia’s past a very high proportion of families lost their male heads as a result of the huge number of deaths and casualties from war. In such situations it was often the case that young, even very young, males were compelled to assume the position of head of the family. Theirs became the responsibility of assuring the continuation of the family name such that they were often married to older women at a relatively or comparatively young age. Particularly prior to the twentieth century, a paramount consideration was the creation of a large family, especially amongst the peasantry, not only in order to work the land but also to withstand an array of impediments resulting from disease, social, religious and political effects and, as mentioned, conflict-related deaths and injuries.

I argue that adopting the gusle tradition within Serbian families has particular importance and relevance to the future of the Serbian population. In modern Serbia and the Serbian populations of Australia, the gusle tradition plays a notably different role in the present as compared to, for example, a century ago. As with most traditional societies and their cultural accounts, modern print and broadcast media have replaced tales, legends and ethical narratives as the deliverers of information, general education and, often, ethical, moral and social values and standards. Many academics (interviewee Mile Nović, for example) and followers of the gusle tradition (interviewee Slobodan Čičarević, for example), as well as this researcher, consider that the role of the gusle tradition within modern Serbian families is to

re-awaken a sense of national spirit and pride, to develop cultural continuity and to foster unity within the newer as well as subsequent generations.

Arguably since the 1960s, the dominant significance and position of the individual over that of the family has become increasingly apparent as evidenced by the increase of personal maladies such as loneliness and isolation and self-esteem and self-importance issues throughout the Western and, increasingly, global societies. It is likely the case that this shift of emphasis from the significance of the family in more traditional societies to a much greater emphasis upon the significance of the individual serves the purposes of Western commercialism and materialism, and perhaps by design or intention. Serbian traditions, especially the epic songs, confer upon the individual an appreciably and distinctively different perspective and responsibility. Throughout the *pesme* genre is found the notion that the strong, prudent individual should inspire the family and indeed the whole of the society via attitudes of positivity, ethics, judiciousness and endurance so as to serve and celebrate one's own family as well as the whole of the nation, its history and its culture.

This philosophy and broad socio-political perspective seems demonstrably at odds with contemporary Western principles, both familial and societal. It is as a foil to the social hegemony of Western individualism that the gusle tradition has its greatest purpose. It is said that the Serbian people are "between two fires". On one side are the embers of the fire of tradition that still burns in the hearts and minds of the elders and which they are not prepared to allow to expire. On the other side is the conflagration of modern Western society with its increasing dominance over the hearts and minds of the young.

Contemporary Serbs are at a crossroad. Serbian young people are now confronted with momentous decisions as to whether or not their traditions and heritage, cultural and ethical attributes and established heroes will be supplanted by a more recent mode of nationalism that glorifies modern protagonists with personalities of dubious character and ethics combined with a societal perspective dominated by Western media and consumer culture of similarly questionable merit and value.

Almost certainly the decisions will determine the future of the Serbian people no matter where they live. This research appears to verify the observation it will not be long until members of the Serbian-Australian Diaspora lose touch with the gusle tradition, at least with

respect to the cultural, ethical, educational and nationalistic purposes that have been at its core for centuries. The social, cultural, political and educational realities of modern Australian society all serve to ensure this result.

Putting aside issues related directly to Serbian-Australians, worth noting is whether or not the comparatively very young Australian society is able to create a social culture and modes of expression truly their own, independent from the cultural hegemony of other societies, particularly Anglo-American. I believe it is possible for identifiably and uniquely Australian cultural entities and modes of expression to develop and transpire. It may be the case, however, that various powerful components within Australian society and government – especially those elements that, for a variety of reasons, remain aligned with outside interests, cultures, social, political and commercial philosophies, and so forth – do not wish to see the development of uniquely Australian modes of creative expression which, arguably, could be brought about most effectively by a merging of traditional cultures into a modern Australian one.

How do you think Serbian young people regard Serbian traditions?

Responding to this research question, Serbian literature academic Slavko Aleksić commented that, unfortunately, people who are outside of the country have greater regard for the gusle (tradition) than the people in Serbia. Aleksić noticed that modern Serbian politicians say that Serbs cannot enter the European Union with gusle. Hence, the gusle tradition has been within Europe all of these years. This tradition is what is national and valuable. Aleksić added,

(The material that) Vuk Stefanović Karadžić recorded has been heard and liked by many foreign poets and artists. Some of them have even said that our epic (tradition) is stronger than the Iliad and the Odyssey (of Homer) ... even greater than some Indian epics. The German poet (Johann Wolfgang von) Goethe even learned Serbian in order to read certain epic poems in their original language. I (Aleksić) say that if we cannot enter (the) Europe(an) (Union) with the gusle (tradition), then neither can the heroes nor even one of the themes from those epic poems, all of which happened on European soil. ... The world respects us more for our folkloric traditions and culture than do we ourselves. Our youth accept only that which came from the West; not that which is their own. Every one of our epic poems is full of strong morals and

messages. Not one song came into existence without reason, regardless of whether or not it has hyperbole and (contains some) poetic freedom.

(Aleksić, 26/10/2006)

Aleksić experienced that, first of all, the gusle are liked by those villagers who had access to the stories and listened to them (being performed) from a young age. Gusle are liked by all highly educated people as well, especially ethnomusicologists. Aleksić noticed that when he was doing his own research the only negative answers he received (about the gusle tradition) were from working class people who mainly came from those parts (of the country) where gusle are played. Why? Because they think that the gusle is a primitive village instrument. Aleksić added,

Because they haven't gone very far from their village, but live in the city, and so as not to look like villagers they say that the gusle traditions are bad. Even so, they often listen to them (in performance). I will give you an example from my own life. Whenever I go to Nevesinje, my ancestral home in Herzegovina – which has a population of only about ten thousand – people immediately run to find a gusle so that I can sing. When I come back to the city, however, maybe only every tenth person would like to hear a gusle performance. In particular, the youth are totally disinterested in listening to the gusle.

(Aleksić, 26/10/2006)

To what extent do Serbs in Melbourne, Australia support the gusle tradition?

Serbs in Australia accept everything labelled as being from Serbia or branded “Serbian” as being superior and are willing to pay more for it or give it greater credence and authority. As mentioned previously, the majority of Serbs in Australia have emigrated from rural areas of various parts of former Yugoslavia. Gusle tradition and Serbian heritage are familiar to them so it is perhaps more natural that these people will uphold and adhere to Serbian culture, especially the gusle tradition. For a variety of reasons, mainly political, most of the émigrés were forced to leave their homeland which is perhaps the most compelling reason why they resolutely seek to keep alive the gusle tradition. Elders have sought to preserve the culture by organising, for example, schools of traditional dancing (*kolo*) within most of the Serbian social clubs around Melbourne.

Given that most of these social clubs are connected with the Serbian Orthodox Church – to varying degrees of formality – a range of other cultural and religious activities are readily available for the Serbs of Melbourne. The socio-economic status of the majority of Serbian families in Melbourne is that of working class or lower middle class; principally factory workers, especially in the older, immigrant generation. Because of their comparatively poor economic situations it is generally necessary for both parents to work, hence Serbian children have limited opportunities to learn their native language as would be the case if one parent were home during the day and Serbian was spoken with them frequently, especially in their pre-school years.

Without a more than rudimentary familiarity with the language children are not able to understand the meanings and nuances of often highly sophisticated language of epic poetry so the depth of their appreciation of their traditions is usually compromised significantly. Without the linguistic fundamentals that are developed prior to formal schooling, that is, before the age of five or six years, it is commonly the case that such children will not develop an ability to “think” in Serbian, a skill without which it is very difficult ever to attain the necessary levels of literary proficiency, particularly apropos sophisticated prose, poetry and philosophy. According to Stanislava Stojisavljević, Serbian language teacher at the Greensborough Serbian Language School, students in her Serbian language classes hardly understand the text and generally do not comprehend the most basic meanings of the epic poetry, let alone its subtleties and its increasingly sophisticated layers of philosophical and linguistic complexity. With respect to matters regarding “Serbianism”, Stanislava Stojisavljević maintains that young Serbs in Australia appear capable only of relating to the contemporary cultural movements in Serbia, most of which are dominated by Anglo-American popular culture and the Western media. Their awareness of contemporary Serbian culture is related predominately to its popular music and although they might be able to pick up some of the basics of the Serbian language, much of the lyrics are highly vernacular and linguistically hybrid and much of the content of the songs presents a fairly distorted picture of contemporary Serbian society and culture. The notion of high literary and performance art, as Serbian epic poetry and gusle have been categorised, is neither a consideration nor a desired attribute of this music and the culture to which it relates. Other ways of keeping the tradition alive, in school curricula, via public performances, within dedicated societies, and so forth,

are fading and increasingly the old ways of Serbian cultural expression are being neglected and forgotten.

The gusle tradition, with its extremely long texts, archaic sound and language, sophisticated ethical and philosophical themes and historical substantiveness, is a genre which, for younger people especially, is neither easy to understand nor to follow, hence difficult to enjoy. It is, nevertheless, a mode of cultural expression which is widely accepted as a significant component of Serbian national heritage, a genre that is indeed viewed by many as a national treasure. In order for the gusle tradition to remain alive in the future, it is necessary that a lot of time and respectful commitment be applied to its cultivation and preservation; qualities which are, unfortunately fairly rare amongst young people from any culture or ethnicity. It is probably very likely, that the gusle tradition in Australia will live on in the memories of the elders, will be recognised by younger Serbs as one of the oldest and greatest of the Serbian cultural traditions, but will move over time from a rare cultural curiosity or artefact to ultimate extinction. Stanislava Stojisavljević commented

Young Serbs in Australia show interest only of relating to the contemporary cultural movements in Serbia. They almost exclusively perceive Serbia through successful Serbian athletes and contemporary Serbian folk music. Any other form of cultural observation is distant to them. (Stojisavljević, S. 2009, pers.com.)

What is the relationship between gusle and Serbian Christianity and to what extent are the members of Serbian Orthodox Church involved with gusle tradition?

According to Father Milan Milutinović who works at the Serbian Orthodox Church in Keysborough, Melbourne, the Serbian Orthodox Church is positioned above all groups and entities and encompass the entire Serbian being. Milutinović's view is that within the Serbian community of Melbourne, the Serbian Orthodox Church is generally agreed to be the only trusted Serbian organisation. He maintains that

it is well remembered by all Serbs that during the times when the government institutions failed to function, as for example during the Turkish invasions and occupation, the minster survived and took over the government's responsibilities despite such responsibilities not being within the purview of the Church. Although not

a duty of the Church, it assumed fundamental government responsibilities for centuries in order to preserve the society and some of its laws – as much as was allowed, anyway – hence to secure the survival of the Serbian people and culture. (Milutinović, 2007, pers. com)

The situation regarding the roles of the Serbian Orthodox Church with respect to peoples of the Serbian Diaspora in Melbourne is similar in principle. The Diaspora scenario is simply more culturally-specific, that is to say that the Serbian Orthodox Church does not fulfil or undertake any secular, governmental role but does indeed seek to protect the Serbian people and their culture within Australia. Father Milutinović commented that such is how Serbs have organised themselves, especially socially and culturally, in Australia. From the outset of the Serbian Diaspora to Australia, Serbian immigrants assumed that without the Church they could not survive as a people; they knew that the existence of the Serbian Orthodox Church in Australia would secure their future (Milutinović, 2007, pers. com).

It is without doubt that certain people in the past have used the Church to promote their personal and political ideas. However, the Church always found ways to overcome this. In the past fifty years or so especially, there have been great spiritual tremors within the people. Milutinović stated that Serbian people had the catastrophic situation where a significant proportion of people have been separated from the Church. Generations have grown up without contact with the Church and, as a result, have had much less contact with the historic, cultural, literary and other heritage elements of the Serbian people. Hence, the Serbian Orthodox Church has had to find ways to properly direct our youth and avoid mistakes from the past happening again (Milutinović, 2007, pers. com).

It is important to note that the Serbian Orthodox Church in Australia is young. It has existed for only about 50 years, as opposed to the homeland of the Serbs where it has existed for nearly a thousand years. Only in this fact (the difference of their length of existence), however, do we see a great difference in the roles of the Church. Most of the people who came to Australia after the Second World War. Their goal was to find a new and better life. Milan Milutinović stated

The Church found itself engaged in this (Diaspora) as well, so some of the people who came over to Australia were priests. The people and the priests managed to erect

churches around Australia. Due to the language barrier (not speaking English) however, they were unable to present themselves to the broader Australian community and to promote Serbian issues, interests and awareness to Australian politicians, academics, artists, et cetera ... which would have been of great use to the Serbian community in Australia. Many priests over the centuries have been active in the gusle tradition, most of whom learned in their villages as children. There were priests among Serbs in Melbourne who actively followed gusle tradition. One of them is still active as a priest in Melbourne. Čedomir Videkanić is a priest in Serbian Orthodox Church in Keysborough, Melbourne. He is not a professional gusle performer but he learned to play gusle and to narrate certain Serbian epic songs from a young age. Videkanić does not perform regularly but he often performs in moments of tranquillity, surrounded by his family and closest friends. Very few of the Serbian priests in Melbourne are or were *guslari*, but all of them know a lot about Serbian epic poetry. Indeed, citations, quotations and paraphrases of the most important parts and messages from the songs are all elements of their everyday vocabulary. Salient segments of the songs are used effectively to impress and educate the masses and especially to uplift the cultural nationalism and spiritualism of Serbs on various occasions. Most of the older generations are familiar with these various segments from the songs and their societal and cultural significance. (Milutinović, 2007)

Some parts from some of the songs are almost certainly better known than any parts of the Christian Bible. Father Milutinović stated that,

the Australian state was very tolerant towards the Serbian church from the beginning. The mere fact that Australia gave permission for the establishment of the Serbian church in Australia, which is in accordance with the laws of religious freedom, was great (although) a normal thing in civilised countries such as Australia. The relationship with other religious communities is present and strong, particularly with other Orthodox communities (especially Greek, Russian and Bulgarian), which is natural because we belong to the same family. What distinguishes us is almost entirely language, folklore and customs only. (Milutinović, 2007, pers.com)

Some Serbian people in Australia use and continue to use Serbian customs and symbols in a way which is not supported by the entire Serbian community in Australia. Commonly, these

people are not welcome in community clubs as they are viewed as presenting an incorrect and inappropriate ‘face’ and perspective about the Serbian–Australians and the broader Serbian community. Unfortunately, the Australian broadcast and print media have at times presented incidents involving these people that serve to accuse and negatively characterise the whole of the Serbian community. Worthy of note in this regard is that young people, most of whom are Australian-born, are the ones who are generally involved with the incidents. It is commonly the case that these young people are in conflict about issues which are often no longer the case in their homeland. Further, the media often fails to explore and report the fact that most of the young people involved in these incidents were indeed born in Australia and that their behaviour reflects a common Australian suburban social situation, especially regarding children of immigrants in ethnic “pockets”, regardless of their countries of origin, than it reflects a situation that is unique to (mostly) young Serbs in Australia. Although this perception is known within some circles of Australian social discourse and commentary, the Serbian community itself has neither the financial wherewithal nor the political power to defend and publicise the perspective – nor do many other of Australia’s large number of immigrant groups and ethnicities.

Father Milan Milutinović commented about a range of issues and considerations regarding immigrant groups and ethnicities in Australia, especially Serbs. He believes that Serbs must advance cooperation as much as possible and break the bondages of nationalism. Milutinović stated,

when I say nationalism I’m not referring to nationality. There is positive nationalism which can be called patriotism, love for one’s people, fatherland, even though one may not be born there but there is love towards one’s fatherland evident in studying history, visiting the country and seeking to develop an ever greater connection to one’s homeland. (Milutinović, 2007, pers.com)

The Serbian people in Australia are truly a colourful and interesting group. By comparison there are priests in Serbian villages who have people around them who live, learn and grow pretty much the same way today as they have for hundreds of years. These priests do not have to think about the range of differences and issues as does a priest in the Diaspora who must be familiar with the various differences within the Serbian people. He (the priest in the Diaspora) must know about these differences and enter into each soul in order to connect

them (to the community, the church and the culture) so as to be a good servant of the people. Not a leader, but a servant. Only the one who serves is able to rise as a leader. The one who tries to show himself as a leader quickly falls, and we know this from the many examples of our history. We must learn to become servants and in serving one another we help all. This is a great challenge and if we want to do things right we need people who know the soul of the Serbian people across all of its diversity. We must begin to express ourselves using the culture that we have and to show it to the general community as much as possible. This includes spirituality which must be approachable to everyone – to the one who is born here as well as the one who is born there. This should be one general cause which will, with the help of an ever larger number of talented people both within the Church and outside of it, contribute to the realisation of the desired goals.”

All interviewees involved in this research, are Serbs from various parts of the former Yugoslavia. They all believe that the Serbian Orthodox Church in the Australian Diaspora is the only link that is still able to hold together and make apparent the traditions and cultural expressions of Serbs in Australia. It is for this reason that almost all Serbs in Australia, regardless of their political, socio-cultural and educational differences, are drawn to the Serbian Orthodox Church. It has been argued that this actuality needs to be realised and accepted, particularly when the numerous cultural and religious challenges in modern Australian society are considered. Throughout this project the researcher was in a position to meet Serbs from other Christian denominations and religious traditions and different cultural backgrounds who nevertheless attended important functions, “feasts”, celebrations and events at some of the six Serbian Orthodox Churches in Melbourne area. Without exception it was their view that although the specifically-religious perspective or approach might be different from that of their own milieu, the critical role of the Serbian Orthodox Church regarding the survival of Serbian culture and indeed of the Serbian nation itself is unmistakable; a role that must be respected and which should be supported. Examples of this viewpoint from within the group of interviewees for this research include Milenko Stojisavljević and Mile Nović, both of whom were baptised and christened as young children but subsequently became members of the Communist Party of Yugoslavia. Nović attended church, often clandestinely, throughout his life and Milenko Stojisavljević, an army intelligence officer, re-established ties with the church as soon as it was safe for him to do so – although he too practised Christianity and honoured the gusle tradition within his home throughout the period of communist rule.

For a large number of Serbs – almost certainly a very significant majority – it is not possible to separate Serbian tradition and culture from the Serbian Orthodox Church. It is primarily for this reason that most Serbs appreciate and support the role of the Church as the most important preserver of Serbian traditions and identity. The purely religious elements and aspects of the Church, although considered important by some, are not the most significant function of the institution in the eyes of many, perhaps most.

Notably, most Church celebrations are also considered to be family celebrations such that religious considerations, rituals and so forth are viewed as being of lesser importance than the mere fact that the whole of the family is united. Within Serbian Orthodox Christianity, Slavic mythology and paganism have always been very much alive, especially with reference to many of the saints and icons. Although commonly refuted by church officials, it is generally well known that the icons and images used to depict the nature and attributes of patron saints, for example, are related directly to pagan gods from Slavic mythology. Almost every Serbian family has a specific Christian saint as its protector. The family's chosen patron saint and the nature and attributes of the specific pagan god from Slavic mythology with which the saint has been amalgamated are viewed as a manifestation of the qualities and aspirations of the given family. The celebration day for a family's patron saint is celebrated once a year in a commemoration called *Slava*, the date for which is dependant upon the feast day of the particular patron saint – rather like the so-called “name day” of many other Christian denominations. This seems to be a custom that is unique amongst Christians. It demonstrates the significance of the family as well as the importance of Serbian culture and traditions, including reverence for ethnic, cultural and societal continuity that is at least a millennium old. The degree of specifically Christian faith amongst the Serbs is perhaps commensurate with that of most other Christian nations of the world. Perhaps almost uniquely Serbian, however, is the perspective that the Church cannot be separated from Serbian culture, traditions and heritage. During the last 1,000 years at least, an array of aspects of life has been pasted into a characteristically Serbian cultural and traditional nucleus. Christian values, pagan attributes and the gusle tradition – itself a cultural, philosophical and artistic entity – are often found side by side in modern the Serbian family, and so it has been for centuries.

CHAPTER SEVEN

In this chapter I shall now discuss the data discussed above in terms of how it relates to my original secondary, and then primary, research questions.

7.1 Secondary questions

To what extent does contemporary *gusle* performance reflect contemporary social and cultural phenomena in Serbia (particularly differentiations in the Dinaric region) and the Serbian-Australian Diaspora of the mid-1990s?

From the categories of relevance emerging from interview transcripts there is strong evidence that contemporary Serbs in Serbia and in the Australian Diaspora find *gusle* performance to hold significant contemporary social and cultural meaning. There is very strong evidence that almost all people who identify as Serbian continue to associate *gusle* performance with their sense of being Serbian. However, there seems to be generational differences in the extent to which they believe this. People who left Yugoslavia after the WWII held that *gusle* performance "helped them to survive the hard times in Diaspora" (Čičarević, 2008, pers. comm), "Kept the hope alive" (Aleksić, 2006, pers. comm), "They were equally important as the Icons" (Koprivica, 2008, pers. comm). From these responses we can see that *gusle* performance remains a strong cultural factor for Serbs between the ages of 50-90.

Younger Serbs, generally do not feel as strongly as their parents or grandparents. Even so, as Čičarević stated "When I feel bad I take the *gusle* and I talk to them." (Čičarević, 2008, pers. comm) Nović felt that he still was "moved to tears everytime he hears *gusle* performances and the song *The death of Mother Jugović*" (Nović, 2006, pers. comm)

In this way we can see how *gusle* performance is still of importance for contemporary Serbian people. I suggest that a social, economic and political upheavals experience by Serbs over the last 70 years has contributed to a continuous social and cultural unease.

To what extent does contemporary *gusle* music-making relate to perceptions of Serbian and Serbian-Australian identity?

Informants responded to this question in various ways. Only two (Tijana Stojisavljević and Đorđe Stojković) believed that contemporary *gusle* music making could not specifically relate to their perception of Serbian identity. As two youngest informants they admitted that they only had a chance to touch the surface of Serbian tradition. All they know is what they learned in Serbian weekend school in Melbourne which is only a narrow choice of the teacher, probably quite generalised lessons about Serbian tradition. They heard about *gusle* through the analysis of epic poetry. Stojisavljević commented "I was always taught by my father about the *gusle* instrument. In schools I had no chance to hear much about *gusle* tradition (Stojisavljević, 2009, pers.comm).

Stojković believed that "the *gusle* music making is only for those Serbs who live in a past or who were born and raised in rural areas of Balkan". He also believes that "gusle tradition does not belong to Australia even if it is practised only by members of Serbian Australian Diaspora".

Another interviewee, Nović observed "The *gusle* are misused for political purposes" (Nović, 2006, pers. comm). Another interviewee, Marjanović stated, "I was born in Australia but I see myself as Serb. As a young boy my only link with Serbian tradition, including *gusle* performance, was via old recordings and rare guest performances from former Yugoslavia. That is how I learned to cherish the tradition. Among all other music from Yugoslavia *gusle* music sounds more traditional than any other music genre and that is probably why Serbs in Diaspora have recognised the *gusle* performance as a Serbian cultural flagship" (Marjanović, 2008, pers. comm). From these responses the *gusle* music making among Serbs is perceived as a national symbol no matter if they are born in Serbia or any other place in the world. *Gusle* tradition remains the cultural icon of Serbian people inside and outside modern Serbia.

How has *gusle* performance in Australia been influenced by the experience of migration?

Slobodan Čičarević said "I arrived in Australia in March 1990. I never separated from the *gusle*." He added "When I came to Australia I didn't speak English. I don't even know it well

now. You know, when you come to a foreign land the foreign sun doesn't shine that well. Then I would take the gusle and when I would feel bad, I talk to them" (Čičarević, 2008, pers. comm).

Another interviewee, Milan Milutinović was born in Australia but he studied in Serbia and Australia. Milutinović stated "gusle tradition travels with us. Whereever we go we must care out tradition, faith and readiness to present our way of life in a best possible way. If some members of other nations believe in their way of life why would Serbs be different in that?" (Milutinović, 2007, pers. comm).

What is the nature of traditional and contemporary *gusle* instrument-making techniques, especially with respect to similarities and differences?

Responses to this question provoked fairly uniform responses. Koprivica said that "these days gusle making process is much shorter then it was before. A hundred or more years ago gusle makers needed to dry the timber in natural way, by wind. Nowadays, the contemporary drying techniques and tools speed up the process of manufacturing" (Koprivica, 2006, pers. comm.).

Aleksić stated "If we are talking about the differences and similarities in gusle making techniques today and in the past, we must highlight the look of gusle as a main difference. Every time brings the new heroes and whoever we had in the past they were replaced with new, contemporary heroes of the time (Aleksić, 2006, pers. comm.).

Rakočević noticed "the look of gusle vary, but it is less important than the messages of the gusle performance. What is said is of greater importance (Rakočević, 2007, pers. comm.). From these responses we can see that the nature of traditional and contemporary *gusle* instrument-making techniques has changed due to technological changes. Despite the technological progress the essential look of gusle remained unchanged for centuries. Gusle maker or one who ordered the instrument chooses the look but the real purpose of the gusle tradition is not only to attract the attention of the audience by the look of carved details. The purpose is clear and unmistakeable, the message is coming via word and no matter how good is the instrument it will be no positive reaction from the audience if the gusle performer is not to the task.

To what extent do the traditional *gusle* instrument-making practices reflect and influence contemporary music performance practice?

According to the researcher, despite the technological process in the quality and speed of the *gusle* instrument-making practice the performance technique is drastically simplified. The singing techniques have changed from several to one which remained in use among the modern *gusle* performers. Koprivica said “In recent times *gusle* players like to shout. Earlier there were four to five styles, and now everything is the same” (Koprivica, 2006, pers.comm).

Aleksić commented “Every *gusle* player has a different melody on his *gusle*. That means that if we had notes the songs would always be the same. Because there are no notes, every *gusle* player is interesting in his own way. Nobody ever sings the same. This is the wonder and beauty of the *gusle*” (Aleksić, 2006, pers. comm.).

Commenting the modern trends in *gusle* performance Plemić argued “I don’t deny the historic and artistic value of epic poetry, but I mostly like to present songs with a theme of newer history” (Plemić, 2006, pers. comm.). In this way it was apparent that contemporary *gusle* performers have adopted a unified type of singing and in that way they denied the century’s old variety of singing styles. The *gusle* performers split into two categories, those who perform old epics and others who prefer to perform contemporary songs with the themes from last civil war in former Yugoslavia. First believe that *gusle* performance has nothing to do with nationalism from the contemporary songs. The old epic songs represent patriotism and the love for the homeland. In the eyes of the old songs followers the artistic beauty of the old songs is something that new songs will never be able to accomplish. The polarity between *gusle* performers becomes stronger with the polarity in Serbian society regarding the reasons and results of the socio political tensions in their lands. As current situation gets calmer it is perhaps to expect that the *gusle* performer’s fractions become closer.

7.2 Research findings

The research found that younger generations of Serbs and Serb-Australians have less knowledge of, and interest in learning about the *gusle* tradition than do older generations of Serbs. This is so partly because of the geographic and economic circumstances in which

young people live. In Australia, Serbian culture is not the dominant culture. Young Serb-Australians have difficulty learning even the basics of the Serbian language.

Although many acquire a rudimentary understanding and level of proficiency in conversational Serbian, the more sophisticated, stylised and elegant nuances found in *pesme* are almost entirely beyond their linguistic abilities and understanding. They are, therefore not able to understand the surface meanings of the *pesme* and let alone the hidden meanings of the works.

A fairly comprehensive understanding of gusle traditions requires a reasonably in-depth understanding of Serbian (or Croatian or South-Slavic Muslim) history (both temporal and religious) and culture. Not having these understandings virtually ensures an inability to preserve the gusle cultural tradition, at least as it understood and practiced within its indigenous contexts.

With respect to young people and the issue of cultural preservation (especially regarding gusle tradition) it is noted that the contemporary Anglo-Australian cultural attitudes, values and perspectives are by far the most prevalent and dominant. The younger interviewees (especially) indicated a view that the vast majority of their understanding and awareness of Serbian culture was based in Serbian (Croatian, etc.) contemporary popular music, which itself is heavily influenced by American/Anglo-Australian/Western European trends, melodies, harmonies, styles, instrumentation, and a range of other musical elements.

In addition, it is important to understand that contemporary Serbian folk music (as opposed to popular music) has, over time, become strongly influenced by the characteristics of, Greco-Turkish and Middle Eastern musical styles, textures and elements. The notion of the preservation of Serbian culture via an awareness of *pesme* and gusle tradition was almost completely outside of the purview of these young people. Even those who were aware of them at a simplistic or very rudimentary level tended to consider that they are “something for old people” or “for peasants” (Aleksić, 26/10/2006) and neither of any interest to them nor of any significance to their lives.

Despite the Australian Special Broadcasting Service (SBS) television and radio networks, apart from news and current events very little else is available to immigrants, regardless of

their origins. This is particularly so with regard to central Europeans and some central Asian ethnic communities. This is almost certainly because there are so many language groups within Australia there is neither sufficient time nor money to fund much more than news and current events from across a representative spectrum of Diaspora communities.

There are four dialects and two other languages now spoken in the former Yugoslavia: Bosnian, Croatian, Montenegrin and Serbian with (Slavic) Macedonian and Slovenian being the separate languages. Prior to the partitioning of the former Yugoslavia in the early 1990s, the four current dialects were perceived as part of one language – Serbo-Croatian – with two written forms, one using Latin characters and the other using Cyrillic characters.

With respect to broadcasting related to people from former Yugoslav backgrounds, SBS programming of news and current events and occasional other types of broadcasts need to be delivered in all six of the languages (not three as would have been the case prior to the early 1990s) such that even greater time and funding constraints are placed on the network apropos the immigrant populations from former Yugoslavia. Contemporary Australian broadcast media (excluding the SBS) source a large percentage of their news and general information and a significant proportion of their entertainment programming – including films, sit-coms, drama, children's programmes, serials, syndicated programmes, and so forth – from the United States of America and the United Kingdom.

Serbian-Australian community members, such as myself, who are passing on cultural resources are among a small group of people inside the community. I asked all twelve of the Australian resident interviewees for their point of view regarding internet affordability and access to information and programming regarding Serbian culture in general and gusle tradition in particular. Their views were notably similar. Firstly, there was a general consensus of opinion that, with respect to the broadcast media, the Australian government choose to foster linguistic and cultural homogeneity, especially with respect to assimilation into Australian culture and the development and enhancement of competencies in English.

Although this position could be considered unfair, the consensus of opinion of the interviewees was that, in the final analysis, the approach compels immigrants to accept the actuality and learn at least the basics of the official language of the country. The approach is

seen as helping to develop the notions of an Australian social identity and the growth of a national character.

Secondly, interviewees were in general agreement that Australia is so far from much of the rest of the world, especially from Europe, that the greater majority of émigrés to Australia are unlikely to return to live in their country of origin, especially those from central Europe. Indeed, the viewpoint was consistent that the greatest percentage of émigrés (especially those from former Yugoslavia) will not be able to afford the time to visit or return to their homelands more than a few times in their lives.

Accordingly, the Australian government supports and promotes a position whereby immigrant populations and their children (especially those born in Australia) are gradually obligated to assimilate into Australian society and culture. My informants noted that cultural assimilation is a socio-political response to demographic multi-ethnicity that supports or promotes the assimilation of ethnic minorities into the dominant culture. It is opposed to an affirmative philosophy (for example, multiculturalism) which recognizes and works to maintain differences.

Several interviewees offered perspectives regarding their views on polarisation within immigrant populations in Australia, especially with respect to the viewpoints of the younger versus the older generations of, in this case, Serbian-Australians. While the elders of the Serbian-Australian population (those not born in Australia) see and call Anglo-Australians “the English ones” Australian-born Serbs and younger immigrants tend to have a different, less-ethnocentric, perspective.

Interviewees commented that Serbian-Australian elders continue to be influenced by the social, cultural and political divisions from ‘old’ Europe while younger people – whether native-born or immigrant – have been educated in and acculturated to Australian ways and perspectives.

The elders feel that Anglo-Australian culture is essentially English (and increasingly American) and are disturbed by the belief that their children are being (or have become) assimilated into an essentially European culture that is different from their own. An extension of this position is that many older Serbs dislike (or at best distrust) the English, and

increasingly the Americans, primarily because of a series of bombings by the British towards the end of the Second World War and various occurrences (especially bombings and perceived betrayals involving both the British and the Americans) during the Yugoslav civil war and the war in Kosovo in the 1990s. Notably, several of the older interviewees (Slobodan Čičarević, Milan Vojnović, Miroljub Stanković and Luka Rakočević) discussed the Australian media blockade during the NATO bombing of Serbia in year 1999 and questionable accuracy and balance issues with undisguised bitterness, although the majority of them appear to view these issues as being consistent with the realities of immigrant and refugee populations from similar circumstances throughout the world.

During all interviews, informants identified themselves as avowed nationalists or positive patriots and contributors to the preservation of the cultural and national tradition. The latter tended to include those with an academic perspective on historical and cultural issues. Also significant to the research is an attempt to illuminate the extent to which the tradition is related to Serbian nationalism in the distant past, the recent past (essentially the twentieth century) and more recent times (essentially since the late-1990s). It is important to notice that interviewee data, collected during the research process support this statements. Aleksić stated

We will difficultly be understood in Europe if in our songs are mentioned people who are characterized as war criminals, or current politics. I personally respect those people and to not regard them as criminals, but I see no connection with our gusle and epic. The present is not for epic and time will sift through what is good. (Aleksić, 2006, pers.comm)

Koprivica added

The gusle are a Serbian instrument, even though there are other people who use them, but they also know their origins. Those people were tricked and because of other circumstances they changed their faith, but retained their customs and culture. They also know from which surname they derive from. (Koprivica, 2006, pers.comm)

The interview participants included a Serbian Orthodox priest and lay scholar of the tradition, several gusle performers and literary scholars with academic or research-based expertise into Serbian literature, *pesme* in particular. Secondary sessions were conducted with the two

scholars/authors to explore more refined queries such as the role of woman in gusle tradition and the role of audience in gusle tradition.

Apart from questions asked of all interviewees some of the interviews included spontaneous questions arising during interviews. These came about as a result of the researcher's need to pursue further a line of enquiry prompted by a particular response, and to align with the tone or ambience of the conversation with the interviewee. All of the interview participants answered all of the questions posed to them by the researcher.

This consideration is of particular significance with reference to the experiences of Serbs in Australia and New Zealand apropos of their perceptions and perspectives related to Serbian culture and traditions, especially those of *pesme* and gusle. As a musician with the experience of more than 25 years of active performance I formulated the questions in a way to suit the form of the interview as a research method but also to make sure that all the participants would understand the questions.

Some interviewees were generally enthusiastic about the gusle tradition as a cultural entity and significant element of Serbian national heritage. Although sometimes almost aggressively patriotic themselves, these generally enthusiastic interviewees viewed all forms and epochs of the gusle genre as being artistically, creatively, historically, ethnically and culturally significant. Interviewees stated that Serbian epic songs often create the sense of pride, universal wisdom and a crucial momentum of Serbian national unity.

Other participants from within the more expert group (academics, practitioners and priests) were unable to view the historical (or 'original') gusle and *pesme* traditions as being aesthetically, culturally or artistically significant, preferring to locate their performance practice and attachment to the genre exclusively from within contemporary milieus, especially with specific reference to the conflicts of the 1990s in former Yugoslavia and socio-political events in Serbia (and other regions populated by Serbs) since that time.

One of the fundamental outcomes of the research demonstrates that a single shared perception of the nature and characteristics of gusle tradition does not exist. Each of the interviewees held a range of knowledge and understanding, perceptions and perspectives

regarding the tradition and, especially, how it relates to their own 'Serbian-ness'. These different perceptions are:

- sense of national affiliation
- literary and poetic/artistic values
- artistic significance of gusle tradition
- positive and negative patriotism
- promotion of the patriotic, religious and sectarian feelings within the people
- interesting and broadly informative element of Serbian culture
- cultural education amongst the broader Serbian population
- family tradition
- peasant tradition
- Serbian tradition without significant influence on modern Serbian society and education
- educative role of epic poetry

The levels of perceptions and perspectives vary between individuals, sometimes with minimal differences. Even a slight variation of the given question (the use of a potentially value-laden word or phrase for example, patriotism/nationalism, war criminal/patriot etc.) had the potential to trigger a response or even result in an aggressively view of the matter under consideration.

Familiarity with the gusle tradition, with Serbian *pesme* in particular and with epic poetry in general, together with an understanding of the mentality of the Serbian people (being Serbian by birth) helped me to navigate deep and potential sensitive 'waters' without losing my way. In addition, as a student of cultural history I have heard or witnessed similar things from people of other backgrounds, whether closely related to Serbian culture and language or completely outside Serbian traditions. In my view, all manifestations of nationalism are essentially the same, simply with different names. Common characteristics include a narrow perspective of the world, of history, of ethnicity, and of religion.

CHAPTER EIGHT

8.1 Conclusions

A significant element of this research relates to details and insights regarding the cultural traditions of the Serbs in Melbourne, Australia. As one of a large number of immigrant populations in Melbourne – in the greater metropolitan area there are more than 20 nationalities each with more than 14,000 people born outside of Australia – the Serbian experience is but one piece in a mosaic of Australia's cultural diversity.

As a young nation, Australia continues to develop a social and cultural identity of its own. This study supports the development of an inclusive Australian society and cultural identity from the Serbian-Australian perspective. Although the specifics of culture and history, religion and politics differ across the ethnicities, many of the insights and observations of this investigation are perhaps generalisable to the various ethnic cultures and sub-cultures in Melbourne and Australia and indeed throughout the world.

This research has contributed that the gusle tradition is an ancient cultural and artistic entity almost certainly original to the peoples of the Dinaric region of the Balkans. To verify this opinion I have explored the symbolic meanings of the tradition and observable practice across several regions of former Yugoslavia traditionally populated by Serbs primarily.

This enquiry has confirmed that the Dinaric region is the only place where the gusle tradition exists continuously. Particularly since the second world war, all other segments of the Serbian population have had increasingly diminished connections with the gusle tradition such that perhaps only the people who moved from the Dinaric region to other parts of former Yugoslavia – for example, to Belgrade, various parts of northern Serbia or Vojvodina – continue to follow and seek to maintain the tradition assiduously.

The essentially tribal communities of the Dinaric region managed to protect, perhaps indeed save, the tradition despite an array of significant impediments both external and, more recently, internal. The Slavs – who continue to be the dominant ethnicity throughout the

regions and nation states of former Yugoslavia, previously Serbia – brought with them their language and characteristic cultural and artistic modes which were combined with those of the existing dominant peoples and culture of the region – primarily the Illyrians.

Given that the word *gusle* as a musical instrument is well known to almost all Slavic people, it is my view that the instrument is of Slavic origin. Crucial to the spread of the *gusle* tradition beyond the Dinaric region of the Balkans was the use of instrument to accompany the performance of Serbian epic and lyric poetry. Indeed, the use of the instrument became so significant to the customary presentation of *pesme* that the genre itself ultimately incorporated the name of the instrument, the art form – with its philosophical, spiritual, historical and educative content – became known as the *gusle* tradition, and presenters of *pesme*, with or without the *gusle* instrument in accompaniment, have, for centuries, been referred to as *guslari*, not “*pesmari*”.

In particular, the epic poems/songs from the period of the Ottoman occupation – approximately mid-15th to mid-19th centuries and the time of creation of the new Serbian national identity – beginning, in some regions, from the early 19th century – served to united the whole of the Serb population as well as several other south Slavic peoples who were in fundamentally the same unfortunate position as their Serbian neighbours. In the various moments of the liberation and subsequent unification of the south Slavic people, *gusle* tradition was regarded as a primary emblem of ethnic and cultural identity and an essential unifying element regarding the ongoing struggles for freedom. In the hands and minds of those who fled their homes over the centuries, the *gusle* tradition transcended the borders of Serbian lands and cultures to become a significant component of the traditions of other, neighbouring peoples, religions and nations. The ongoing assimilation of Serbs within the populations of other ethnicities, nation-states and religious and societal groups – for example, Albanians, Croats and Bosnian Muslims – resulted in the *gusle* tradition being widely accepted and, in many instances, modified and practised by peoples other than ethnic Serbs.

Serbs are a comparatively small ethnic minority in Australia. The 2006 census confirmed that approximately 95,000 residents of Australia considered themselves to be of Serbian ancestry, while the 2001 census indicated that about 20,000 residents of the Australian state of Victoria were born in either Serbia or Montenegro. Of these Victorian residents, it is estimated that not less than 50 percent lived in Melbourne, the capital of Victoria. Therefore, it is reasonable

to assume that there were at least 17,000 people of Serbian ancestry living in the greater Melbourne metropolitan when this research was commenced in 2006.

It is important to note that the largest percentage of Serbs in Australia emigrated from parts of former Yugoslavia other than Serbia. Those people came mainly from the regions where gusle tradition is still revered and practised, especially the Dinaric region, parts of which are in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro, Croatia/Dalmatia, Macedonia and Northern Albania. Despite these origins, Australian Serbs do not follow the gusle tradition in large numbers. Serbian culture is only apparent in Serbian social clubs, most of which are affiliated directly with the Serbian Orthodox Church of Australia.

When questioned about their awareness of the gusle tradition, most of the research participants interviewed commented that their lack of significant awareness, general inactivity or non-involvement regarding gusle tradition was a result of their having been “assimilated into the Australian way of life”. Factors that were viewed as having impact upon this consideration include: limited free time, primarily as a result of financial imperatives; inability or lack of desire to spend free or recreational time devoted to matters of Serbian culture, including the gusle tradition; the notion that the fervent wish to return to the homeland causes one to “put off” practising the tradition until one goes back, that is when it will be more “real” and less alien to, even at odds with, the dominant (Australian) culture.

Non-interview discussions with many Serbian-Australian young people indicate that another consideration is a strong desire to embrace Australian (that is, essentially American and Western European) popular/mass media culture – to be “just Australians”, not Serbs who live/were born in Australia. On the other hand, Serbs in Australia who continue to follow the tradition comment that these factors and considerations are simply excuses which indicate that the individuals have either not been introduced properly to Serbian culture and traditions or are, for whatever reason/s – including perhaps how Serbs are sometimes portrayed in the Western media – ashamed of their origins.

Other related discussions undertaken by me indicate that Australian-Serb followers of the gusle tradition feel that they are free in Australia to express and to practise any manner of cultural tradition that they wish to, gusle or otherwise. By and large theirs is the view that it is incorrect to claim that Australian cultural and multi-cultural policy provides insufficient

support for or is, in some sense, not accepting of other cultural traditions within Australia, as has been claimed by various ethnic minority groups. They feel that it is inappropriate to argue that ethnic minorities, including Serbs, have been somehow culturally marginalised, even suppressed, by being compelled to assimilate into the socio-cultural and political mainstream of modern Australian society.

Their general opinion is that nothing is stopping Serbs in Australia from practising their cultural traditions, including the gusle tradition. If Serbs in Australia wish to practise the gusle tradition or indeed might have some vision of the tradition being somehow included or incorporated within an evolving Australian culture, no impediment exists. That it is to say, this research indicates that Serbs in Australia have all of the requirements for the successful preservation of their national identity.

Although the wholesale incorporation of the gusle tradition into contemporary and future Australian culture is not a realistic outcome, the historical, philosophical, didactic and heroic ingredients of the tradition make it a worthy contributor to the pan-cultural eclecticism that is here favoured. In any event, as long Serbs in Australia continue to honour and preserve the gusle tradition it will be considered a part of the cultural emporium that is modern Australia.

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